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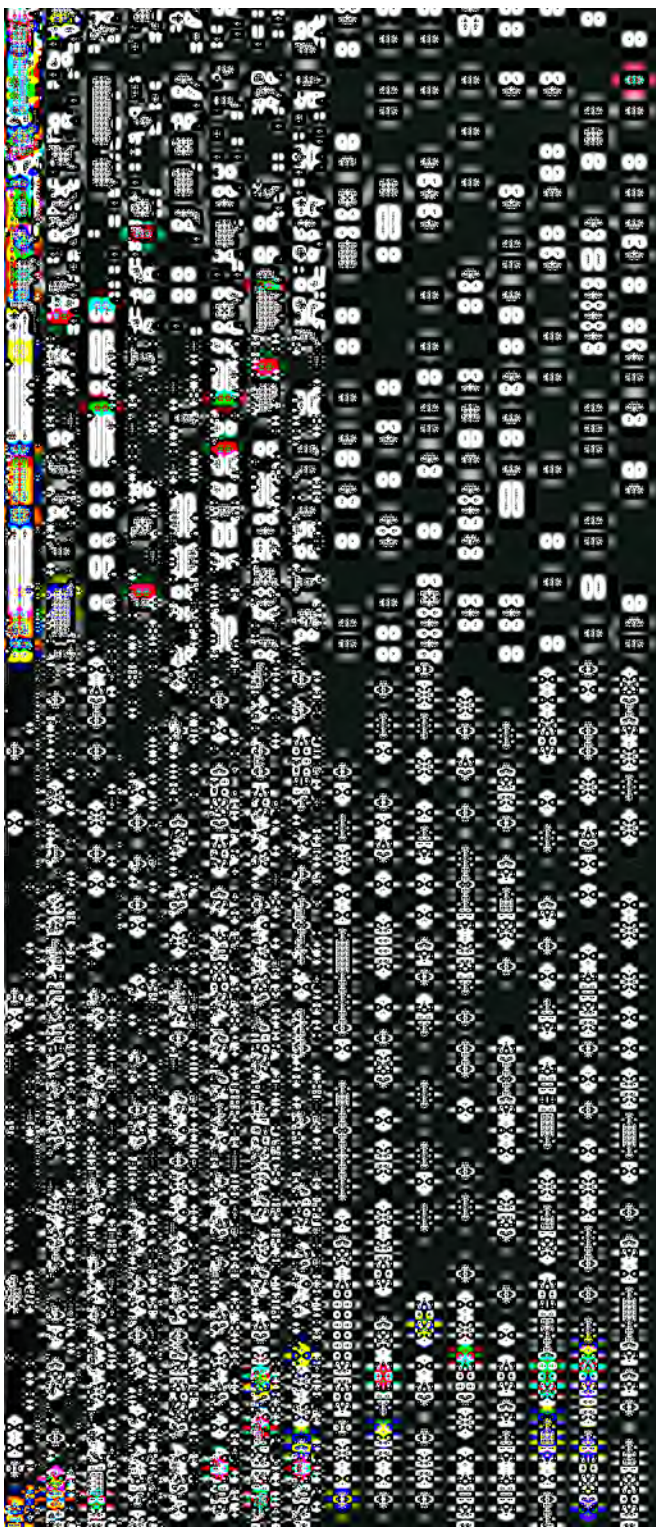
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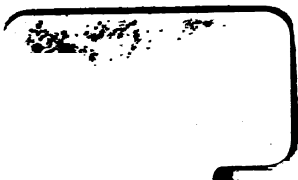
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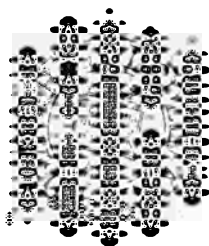




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THE GAYWORTHYS.



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THE GAYWORTHYS.

CHAPTER I.

MIXED NEWS FROM HOME.

"THERE—now I'm happy! but 'twon't last," said Huldah, letting every limb droop and every finger drop, as she sank, utterly wearied, into her low wooden rocking-chair in the doorway, luxuriating for an instant in that beginning of rest that only excessive weariness can know.

The young baby was got to sleep at last, and laid in the cradle just within. The two old babies had been washed and put to bed in the little bedroom off the kitchen, built so after the New-England fashion. It wasn't much of a house to keep—only these two rooms, and a bit of a best room, at right angles; but it was hard housekeeping for all that, out here upon a prairie edge in Illinois. Huldah felt the faint blessedness now and then that only breathes over one with momentary relaxation, when every muscle has been strained as on a rack.

"Gin out? Well, set and rest," said Eben, cheerily. He was sprinkling and folding for her from the big basket

full of clothes, large and little, that the hard-worked wife and mother had got mostly through the wash that morning before the nestlings had begun to peep. He did not look unmanly either, the stout farmer, so employed. He had gathered them all up, from bush, and grass, and line, when he came home from the early corn-field to his dinner. By and by, when Huldah had "set and rested" for a while, they would stretch the sheets together. This they did for old times' sake. There were only two,—full-sized ones,—and the stretching might have been done without. But there was never a Monday night they were not duly measured, and pulled, and folded as of old; and always when it was done, Eben would lean down to his wife's ear, with the same whispered question, "Ain't you 'horry' yet, Huldah? Hadn't I better have come alone?" And, quoting still from the old homestead tradition of Joanna's childhood, Huldah would say, saucily, "Hadn't you better hold your tongue? 'When I horry I let oo know.'" Varied in their phrasing sometimes, question and answer; but this always the substance and the joke. There are some little foolish reiterations that grow sacred.

Huldah was tired—she was that every evening of her life—but she was not sorry. She sat looking out under the scattered oaks toward the east—they had built their rude dwelling with its face towards home—and watched the reflected lights that lingered there, and remembered that it had been dark an hour and a half already in Hilbury. Somehow, her thoughts went back there more strongly than usual to-night. The early spring weather took them thither. It had been one of the harbinger

days of the kindling year. The air was mild at the open doorway, and the swelling buds of the oaks showed life in every sturdy limb. The woods would be green shortly, and the broad prairie jewelled with its flowers. She thought involuntarily of other spring times; we always do when this primal joy revisits us. She was in a maze of recollections and imaginations when Eben came to the bottom of the basket where the sheets lay.

"'Most ready, little woman? Or shall I roll 'em up athout the pullin'?"

He knew she would never let him do that. If she had "gin out" to such a degree, he would have dropped all in dismay, caught the horse and galloped bareback two miles to the nearest neighbour, and four more for the doctor.

So they pulled and folded, and ended with the old query and reply, as I have said. Then Eben put his strong arm round the little woman's buxom waist, and drew her to the doorway; and they both stood there, and looked out together.

There came the sound of a horse's tread along the turfy track, away up under the trees in the magnificent "oak-opening."

"It's Grueby coming home from Waterloo," said Eben. "He'll have news, mebbe."

Neighbour Grueby trotted up, on his heavy, white farm horse, and held out something in his hand—a letter.

"For me?" said Eben, coming to the horse's side.

"You or your wife; it's all the same, I reckon."

"Come in, farmer; won't ye?"

"Never stop when I bring letters: too much company's worse 'n none."

"What's the news? An' how's your folks?"

"My folks is all well, thank ye. There's your paper; I'd nigh forgot it. News? Nothin' but manifest destiny, and takin' in Texas. Five new slave states! Sounds big, don't it? But I reckon, Farmer Hatch, we may hurry in't the large end o' the horn, and have to crawl out at the little one, by'n by. Manifest destiny may turn out somethin' mighty pretty; and then, again, it mayn't! Gee up!"

Neighbour Grueby rode on, and Eben and Huldah sat down together on the great oak log, that served in place of a doorstone, before their dwelling, to read their letter.

*"Mrs Huldah Hatch,
Care of Ebenezer Hatch, Esq.,
Graysonville,
— Co., Illinois."*

"Looks dreadful business-like an' important; don't it, Huldah?" said Eben, turning it over. "Esquire! Lucky it didn't make a mis-go of it, superscribed like that! Here—it's yourn!"

Huldah took it, and sat, holding it, almost absently.

"Well, ain't you goin' t' open it? 'Cause the daylight's goin', and the night-damp's comin' on, an' I shall have you with the fever 'n ager, nex' thing, if I don't take care!"

"Eben," said Huldah, gravely, "somethin' 's happened to home!"

"Things are allers happenin'. The world keeps turnin' round. You can't help that."

It was clear Eben was more curious than anxious. So Huldah opened the letter.

She held it so that Eben could look over as she read. Eben made no demur at availing himself of the privilege mutely offered.

The clear, clerkly hand, large and strong, showed plain, even in the twilight. They read it through, and then Huldah laid it down upon her knees, and the two looked in each other's faces.

It was strangely mixed intelligence. Something to be sorry for,—something to be glad over. Their simple hearts hardly knew which feeling to give way to first. Five hundred dollars was a great deal of money—more than Eben Hatch and Huldah had laid by together before they married. But then, the good old doctor was dead.

"I suppose we mightn't even have seen him again in this world, if he'd lived to the age of Methusalum," said Eben, philosophically, after a few minutes. "It's a long stretch atween here and Hilbury hills; an' I don't expect, hardly, we'll ever fetch it now, Huldah?"

"It'll pay off your mortgage, and set you clear with Cousin Joshaway," said Huldah, thoughtfully; "and help to buy that pair of steers besides."

"They'll miss him awfully round there, won't they? Fact, there's nothin', now, to hender their *all* goin'—'s I see."

"I can't seem to feel it's I oughter," said Huldah, with

a pang of conscience. "I can't help bein' glad for you, Eben. It's an awful temptation havin' money left yer. I s'pose it's lucky—'tain't no more, or my heart would have hardened up like old Pharaoh's. Land sake, Eben! what do folks do that git their thousands?"

"He *meant* we should be glad, Huldah. It's jest what he did it fur. But it's your money; 'tain't mine."

"What kinder difference does that make, I should like to know?" Huldah spoke in capitals.

"It don't seem right exac'y, for me to put it inter land 'n stock. I might git inter differkelty, an' lose it all. It ought to be tied up, somehow, for you 'n the children."

"Eben Hatch, you jest hold your tongue! You're fairly ridickleous. We got merried, 'cause we expected to live together, didn't we? Well, that's the expectation I'm goin' on. I ain't agoin' to calc'late on any other condition yet a while. I'm a wife; I ain't a widder. If I was, I know whose business 'twould be to take care o' me an' the fatherless; now, it's yourn. An' all we've got is to go to help. I guess 'twould be a pretty fixin' o' things to lay away money against you're used up and gone, and to leave you hampered up with worries enough to bring it to pass. I don't want to kill no two birds that fashion. More'n that, it spiles a woman t' have property 'f her own. It's queer; but a woman don't value anything else—comfort, or health, or good looks, or what all; she lets 'm all go, and never thinks twice of it; but she can't stand havin' money separate. Don't let me ever see it, Eben, or realise anything about it. I couldn't stand it, I know; you'd never hear the last of it.

I don't see why the doctor didn't leave it to you, straight out."

"It was left to your mother, Huldly. Here's the clause in the will copied right off. 'To Serena Brown; or she not surviving, to her daughter, Huldah.' Huldly, that will was made more'n a dozen years ago!"

"To be sure. It's the will my mother was knowin' to. I never thought of that."

"Nor I nather," said Eben, emphatically. "But I think on't now. An' it jest reminds me of sunthin else. Do you remember that air kite-bob, Huldly?"

"That what?"

"That bit of paper that we put our names to, in the doctor's study, the night of the strawberry party, five years ago?"

"Certain. But what's that to do with it?"

"This is the kite; an' that air was the bob—the big bob at the tail-end, Huldly, you may depend on't. An' if 'twarn't never tied on, the kite had no business to be flew athout it!"

"Well, what then? What concern is it of ours?"

"I don't know, Huldly. I must think it over."

The baby cried, and Huldah went in. Eben stayed by the threshold thinking. He came to a conclusion, apparently, at last; for he said to himself, "That's what I'll do. It's workin' in the dark; and it mayn't fetch it, for she's thunderin' sly. But it's the best I know of, and I'll do it."

The result was this letter, that Jane Gair got ten days after.

"MRS REUBEN GAIR,—This to send our respects to you, Huldys and mine, and our sincere condolences. We were sorry enough to hear of the doctor's death, though he did remember Huldys so handsome. And that is what has set me out to write this letter. We was notified to draw on Mr Reuben Gair at our convenience for the amount of five hundred dollars, willed to Huldys by the old gentleman. I say again, it was a handsome thing of the doctor, and we are as thankful as we ought to be. But there's one thing lays in the way in my mind, and that is this, whether or no they've found everything that has to do with the settling up. This money was left to Huldys mother; showing it was an old will, for widow Brown died more than a dozen year ago. Now, five year ago, me and Huldys set our names to a bit of paper for the doctor, witnessing to it. It might have had to do with the will, or a piecing of it out, or altering it, or then again it mightn't. The doctor didn't show us anything but his name. It was done the night of the strawberry frolic, five year ago, when you was up to the farm, after the folks was gone. *I see you up and round in the next room afterwards*, and I thought maybe the old gentleman might have been a-showing it to you first. Anyway, I suppose you might know as well as anybody the likeliest place to look for it. And so before we do anything towards the handling of this money that they say is ours, I think it right to put you in mind, and tell you *what I know about it*, for fear as if there should turn out to be anything overlooked. No more at present from yours truly,

EBENEZER HATCH."

The blood rushed quickly along her veins as Mrs Gair first glanced this letter through. Then she calmed herself, and pondered on it. Eben had written shrewdly. He meant that she should ponder. She wondered just how much or how little he knew of this thing. Possibly all that she did. "The Doctor *showed* them nothing but his name." But Eben and Huldah had lived on in the house for six months after; and who could say there might not have been opportunities for them as well as for herself? "They might have done it, as well as not, a hundred times, I dare say. And that would account for their being so ready with their information. They're sure enough it makes no difference to them for all their show of honesty."

There are persons to whom you must demonstrate the impracticability of a meanness before you can convince them that it has not been committed. Could, would, and should, are to them indiscriminate signs of the potential.

Assuming for granted, then, as the safest conclusion, that Eben and Huldah knew it all, what course was she to take? She could not pass this over in silence. She must needs say or do something in reference to it, or the fact of her concealment would inevitably appear and implicate her.

She took up the letter again, and read it carefully. She was alone in her own room. Her husband had gone to his counting-house for the afternoon. He had given it to her just as he left home, having forgotten it before.

There was no help for it. He knew she had received it. He knew it must relate to the business of the legacy. She would have to read it—show it—to him. She dared not destroy it, and give her own version in words. That

of itself would be strange and suspicious. Besides, she had done,—she had intended,—no terrible wrong. This would be one.

“I see you up and round in the next room afterwards and.” These words occupied the first line of the second page of the letter. They concerned only herself. She took her scissors from the basket at her side, and cut the sheet across carefully. The date and address upon the first page were safe below. She mutilated nothing that should be left. This was a happy thought,—a fortunate practicability. The letter read connectedly and *safely* without it.

Then she took the strip of paper, looking at those emphasised words once more. *“Afterwards.”* Then he could not know—watch her as he might have done—that she knew anything more than he,—than he *professed* to know. He doubtless suspected, but he could prove nothing, even to his own certainty.

Her course was plain.

Ebenezer Hatch was under the impression that some paper signed by himself and wife, five years ago, might be of a testamentary character. Had any such been found? This was the purpose and inquiry of the letter. She had only, then, to submit it to her husband, as executor under the will, and ask the question. Such a paper might, on search, be found; very well; then it must be; then she would have been a very honest woman, and must comfort herself with that. Honesty, as well as greatness, may be thrust upon one. If nothing should be found, they might all conclude that it had been either some minor transac-

tion, some formal acknowledgment in an every-day business matter, whereof the record was in other keeping; or that, of whatever nature, it had been destroyed. She—Jane Gair—was bound to be no wiser than the rest. She looked at herself from the standpoint of others, and judged herself by what would be their knowledge.

And all the while, those few lines—that half page of her father's own handwriting—stood clear in her memory. She knew—she only of any living—what he had once meant at least to do. But hers was a secret knowledge; his had been a secret intention. If he cancelled it afterward, what right had she, even were it possible without shame and self-disgrace, to betray a private, transient purpose, never confided to her, learned only by an *accident*, and that no existing record could substantiate? She wished heartily—even with a resentfulness—that the accident had never happened. She felt ill used of fate, that she had been led into this annoying cognisance. Somehow she was for ever being forced to feel responsible, when she would far rather leave all to its own working.

“If he cancelled it!” That hidden paper might alone reveal whether he did or no. And that she could not tell them of. She had no right to know of it,—she could not explain such knowledge. It might be nothing; and she might go all her life with a self-reproach that had no foundation. There it must lie; and she must doubt,—she had really made herself think she did doubt,—unless they found it. She almost hoped they would. Almost, but not wholly, after all, else she could have bidden Reuben search well the papers in the case where they had

found the will ; she might have managed to be with him ; she might have re-discovered it herself. She let herself slide, half involuntarily, into deeper wrong ; she held her peace ; she made herself passive. Her very soul lied unto itself in its false, bewildered reasoning ; that is the inherent retribution of false souls.

Reuben read the letter, and went to Hilbury. To his question, " Did your father ever mention anything of the sort to you ? " Jane had answered, " Nothing." Jane Gair had never told a lie.

She stayed at home ; Say was not well ; it was out of her power to go ; the thing had been settled for her ; she must wait.

Up at the old house, they wondered at Eben's communication, Joanna, and Rebecca, and Reuben ; Prudence Vorse had already gone over to the Hoogs's when this happened. Then they looked over again all the miscellaneous papers in the doctor's tall secretary-desk, that held the papers of generations ; they emptied its pigeon-holes, ran over files of bills, packets of letters, examined even the bundle of yellow documents in the panel cupboard, opened again the ancient letter-case where the will had been, sorted the contents of its larger packet that told the tales of old absences, and intimacies, and courtships, laid them back reverently ; and found nothing.

Greater secrets than this have lain as shallowly concealed. Men have walked, for generations, over hidden treasures that a spade-plunge would unearth ; murder screens its crimson stain with flimsy cover, and moves, unchallenged, among the living ; science stumbles over

truth that waits to be unveiled ; invention lays her finger alongside the spring she seeks to touch, and misses it.

All things lie near enough if we knew but how to look.

Mr Gair answered Eben's letter.

" MR HATCH,—DEAR SIR,—Yours of the —th ultimo was duly received. A re-examination of all the papers left by the late Dr Gayworthy has been made, and nothing of the description you refer to has been brought to light. We can only conclude that it was either not of a nature to affect the disposal of his estate, or that he saw fit, at some subsequent time, to destroy it. The legacy to Mrs Hatch lies ready, subject to your draft.—I am, &c., your obedient servant,

REUBEN GAIR."

Mrs Gair said to herself, when her husband told her of the thorough search, and its result :—

" Of course, whatever it is, they must have found it now. And it turned out to be nothing, just as I supposed."

So she told herself, asking no questions ; and made believe to be quite innocent and easy in her mind. Laying something asleep there, which would surely waken, none the less, at intervals, her whole life long.

She made the most, now, of her mess of pottage. She flourished in her fashionable mourning, and in her self-conscious dignity as an heiress. She fancied all Selpott knew that this was what her crape meant.

Now, if Mrs Topliff noticed whether it were black or

blue, it was as much as she did. As to the death it stood for, it scarcely entered into her ideas that people of that sort had fathers to lose. And forty thousand dollars ! Why, if she had even heard of it, what would that have been in the ears of the woman who inherited a quarter of a million ; whose husband was reputed worth a quarter of a million more ?

Poor Jane Gair ! She bit the ashes of her delusion, and knew not even that they were ashes. She put the price of sin in her bosom, and only the evil spirit that had tempted and betrayed her knew that it was turning, already, to dust and withered leaves.

Ebenezer Hatch was as fully persuaded as ever that there had been something to find out, if he could only " have fetched it."

And all went on their several ways, and these things bided their time.

CHAPTER II

MUSIC BETWEEN THE ACTS.

THERE is a music that only comes in the pauses of life;—when the deafening pulsations of quick joy, and keen sorrow, and restless uncertainty, and eager hope, are laid asleep for a while, and nothing stirs them;—when the every-day current of a common living bears us on, and the weeks, and months, and years glide by, each one with a look so like the last, that we forget to count them, or to remember that we are growing old;—when the whirr of the loom that weaves our life-story grows monotonous; when the shuttle runs quietly, and makes no leaps that throw up vivid threads in bright irregular spaces, flashing out, so the design that makes it individual;—when, in and out, the fibres intertwine, and mix a common home-spun web, like all the rest around us.

There is music between the acts; when the elements of whatever in our lives might combine into great utterances, and sweeps of mighty melody,—into wonderful chorales and harmonies, if the divine touch were given, breathe low, one to another, whispering only, We are here—we are waiting. It is an Eolian thrill that tells of all possible ecstasies and passions; yet is sweet and calm, a present

peace, a repose, it may be, after wails and discords that have gone over us.

The simplest life knows this,—perhaps it is only to a simple life it comes. It came to the home in Hilbury, between the hope and pain of youth, and whatever ripened of these, later; it was the gentle ripening itself, as it went on.

Let me show you if I can.

It is twelve years since our quiet chronicle began. The old Gayworthy mansion stands as it stood then, pre-eminent in its traditional mellow tint among the dusky-red farm-houses about it. There is little altered here in the centre; the old spire rises as it rose, not twelve but a hundred years ago, where the churchyard, gray with stone, and green with turf, holds its century of dead; where the farms lie out, field beside field, as they lay when the Gayworthy house was fresh and new; owned in the same names, mostly, even, or, if not, still spoken of by the same old family titles wherewith they had first been christened.

Changes had gone on all around; had crept within the very township. Down at the Bridge, the quiet primitive neighbourhood was gone, and the gentle singing of the river to itself was gone—lost; and the green forest that swept its robe down to the very border of the stream was gone; at least, had had its skirts cut, like the old woman in the rhyme, till, whether it were itself or not, like the same bewildered ancient, it could scarcely tell; and, in place of all this, was a great, whizzing, roaring, whirling, crashing, crowded, dusty factory village grown up; a conglomeration of steam, and wheels, and fire, and

shrieks ; whence the railroad reached out, east and west, its iron length, grasping a great city, a hundred miles away, at either end.

But this was more than three miles distant still ; it would hardly creep this way yet a while ; it might go up and down the river, along the rattling vertebræ of that backbone of iron, which, joint after joint, stretched itself those hundreds of miles up and down the country, a marvellous inception of growth, that would throw out its limbs afterward, and develop, bit by bit, its huge skeleton, clasping in its prone embrace whole states.

As yet, the old Gayworthy farm lay in its primeval quietude ; save for the far-rending echo of the steam-whistle that divided the air sharply at certain intervals, and the rumble that came after, through the hills, telling of that strange swift intercourse, right and left, with the busy world that lay about its stillness.

And the two sisters lived here still. Changed little by the years, any more than the old home ; but exactly because so little changed, grown, like the old home and its neighbourhood, to seem, if brought suddenly to light and contrast, somewhat behind the times they lived in.

Rebecca was thirty-one ; Joanna just beyond her in years ; they had crossed the line of youth into old maidenhood ; nobody looked any longer for change in them ; they would count their years out, as people did here, among the hills ; they would be " the old Miss Gayworthys," as Joanna had prophesied to herself.

Rebecca had the same sweet saint-like face ; wanting something, perhaps, that a broader life might have kindled

in it; her ideas, also, had their gentle limited range; wakening to the touch of all small local sympathies, cramped and narrow people of larger interests might say; yet this want, this cramp, was only earthward—she had a secret outlook toward the infinite; on the side of God, her soul lay open, and her thought rayed wide.

She had never changed the fashion of her hair even, put straightly back—a little thinner it was now over the forehead—and turned up behind in the same simple knot. Prim? yes; perhaps so, but sweet also, as a late white summer pink, with no profusion or set-off about it, only profuse in the fragrant life that scatters from it viewlessly, and makes a blessedness around.

Joanna was odd, quick, trenchant, and emphatic, as of old; full of little merry sarcasms and abruptnesses, you would think her life lay in looking on at life; she had her own secret—a living secret still—leavening all that was unseen, and shaping her inmost experience and growth as God saw them. She looked bright and young, younger than Rebecca even, who had the youth of seraphs that is eternally old, also. Rebecca had never been young with the mere bloom of earth.

Another of Joanna's self-prophecies, also, had come true. She "grew fat," not obese, but round and jolly. It turned to that, as she had said. She might as well be merry and quick, it was the only outside bearing for her. Pining melancholy had nothing to do with her constitution. Her heart might break, but it would be more likely to end with a dropsy than an atrophy; on the whole, she

preferred to keep herself healthy; this good sense also was constitutional.

The old house was a pleasant place to come to, under the rule of these two. It was quaintly and cheerily ordered. There were plenty and kindness there; there was speckless purity; you had a feeling that is only had in such old houses, that anything whatever might come forth for delectation, from its fragrant cupboards, its teeming presses. All Hilbury was glad when the sisters gave a tea-party; the art of strawberry shortcake had not been forgotten; there was many another dainty art that had its season. There was no need or caprice of sickness that was not sure to be supplied from hence.

Old neighbour Hartshorne—living still, but very old and feeble—knew these dainties well. Wine of elderberry, blackberry, and currant; jellies of marvellous strength-giving; dishes of dexterous compounding, that Mary Makepeace could only lift her eyelids over, came, like fairy gifts, to the old man's board and store. Not officiously or overburdeningly; there were kindnesses accepted, even asked for, in return. Gabriel came over in the twilight, and went down the fields, and talked their farming over with them; he rented some lots that they did not care to use; he had man's counsel, and a ready hand for them, in all the emergencies of their feminine administration. It was a "comfortable friendliness." Was there ever a sigh in the heart of either that this was all?

Sarah Gair waked one spring morning, blissfully happy,

for the hour, in the old "red room" at Hilbury. She had come at night, when it was too late to take in all the familiar pleasantness. She opened her eyes now, almost at the first dawn; listening, with a joy of abundant content and satisfaction, to the crowing of the cocks from farm to farm. She had come to stay for the summer with the aunts. Further than this summer, away from it, back or forward, Say did not care to look. It held in it a concentration of all delight and hope. Other hopes might wait, anxieties and disappointments—for even at nineteen she had these—were set by; it was "music between the acts of life;" for her this summer was an æon.

She had left school the summer before; she had been a winter "in society," the society, uncertain and sporadic, that Mrs Gair had scrambled into relation with.

Say had had a glimpse of fashionable life, not a full, long, every-day look, as some girls she knew had; just enough to make her feel she only half lived—just enough to make her doubt whether she most longed for more, or hated it altogether. There were wearisome, companionless hours; her mother was capricious, irritable; Say felt she valued her more for the opinion she could win of others, than for her intrinsic dearness to her as her child. This contradictoriness, this wordless disappointment, this lack of sympathy, checked her exuberant youth, thwarted its life, made her begin, as the spring came on, to look pale and thin.

She was to go somewhere. She begged for Hilbury and the kind aunts. Her mother said the sea-shore; she wanted to keep in the world's track, to go where its

leaders went. Say struggled against this decision, she wanted the sweet country air, she didn't want to dress and worry, and her father took her part. For the hope of the bloom that should come back against the winter, Mrs Gair had yielded—for this, and also because she must, when once her husband said the thing. She, Jane, would go to the beach; the Topliffs and Semples were to be there, she bore ever in remembrance the proverb, that out of sight is out of mind. She would keep herself in sight, would keep a place warm for Say, the child would get tired of the woods and hayfields; by and by, and come down.

For herself, she hardly ever went to Hilbury now. The keen air of the hills no longer agreed with her; it was too bracing, she said. Mrs Gair had grown nervous and delicate. The twelve years past had changed her greatly in health and appearance. Her face was no longer round and unlined; it was graven with a deeper record than that of twelve ordinary years, lived as she had seemed to live them. She was full of whims; a great many old habitudes had become impossible to her. This, of going to Hilbury, was one; she had "never been able to care for it since her father's death had changed all, so," and now the mountain winds must be eschewed. There was, truly, something in the air that had made the place unhealthful to her; there was a taint for her in the old home; a dead thing lay there, hidden away, that she only knew, a reminder of corruption came with every breath—to none else, only to her. She thought she had forgotten this, she had laid it back, years ago, out of sight, and turned away from it, telling herself it was nothing. She knew none the less

that she *should* remember, if she let herself glance back. She pushed all recollection from her ; she would not ex-hume the old doubt, and argue over again what she had once settled ; her whole life was a resistance, a restless seeking for absorption in other things. And so it fretted her away. And by her side, shadowed also by the cloud of the unknown evil, a chill upon her life, she knew not whence, grew her young daughter, longing for a fulness of joy and warmth and love, and finding it not.

Mr Gair was wholly occupied with business. "Your money or your life," is the daily challenge on the world's highway to such as he. One or the other must be given up. Mr Gair made money, and gave up his life,—the best of it. He loved his child, he laboured for her, it was all for her ; so it was all for her that Jane had sinned the old, secret, silent sin that ate her soul away to-day, and the child, meanwhile, was alone in the world. Orphaned, by her parents' very side.

There was pure, perfect delight for her, only here, in Hilbury.

She woke there, this bright spring morning, in the old "red room." She lay looking and listening. Listening to the sounds of arousal about the country side, the *far-off* sounds that make it beautiful to listen where such may be heard. In the city, there was only the rumble and clatter just under her windows, this smothered in upon her, heavily, by the close brick walls ; now and then the striking of a clock, or the chiming of a bell, a few streets off. Here, there was all the faint, sweet music that comes floating over breadth of field and forest, the

wind surging in the great trees, the whistle of the ploughman, and his cheery call to the oxen, beginning their day's work away over there, where the brown furrow lay like a fine-lined carpet over the sunny hillside; the distant singing of wood-birds, and wandering notes from high up overhead; the flutter and chirp in the boughs close by; the voice and stir of domestic creatures about house and farm-yard; there were only these in all the air; no din and bustle of more complicated life to drown them, they came in pleasant alternation and succession, and, blending, told of space, and joy, and freedom. They ministered to Say's young, asking spirit.

What her eyes rested on was as simple, and pleasant, and quaint—as peculiar to the place—as its out-door tones. The faint crimson of the stained walls; the black stencilled diamonds of their border, following around, up and down, and over panels and frames; the antique-patterned red and white chintz that flounced the dressing-table, and draperied the windows, and covered the great-easy chair that Say could creep from side to side in; and hung about the high-framed bedstead; the old mourning piece of floss work over the mantelpiece, that some great-great-aunt had once achieved; the yet more ancient embroidery that companioned it,—the “arms of Gayworthy, of Yorkshire,”—these, Say never tired of; they rested her. Here was something that had grown with years; that had been as she saw it now for lives'-lengths. There was no hint of restlessness nor striving; nothing “bran new,” as there was in Selport. She did not make this analysis of what she felt, though—she only lay, and

drank it in, at eyes and ears; and felt deliciously happy.

The door from the great kitchen chamber, into which half-a-dozen rooms opened, moved softly ajar. It was behind the foot curtains, and Say could not see.

"Auntie?" she said, with a bright little ripple of gladness in her voice. "Which auntie?"

She knew the soft step, an instant after, before Aunt Rebecca's gentle eyes looked in upon her, through the flung-back curtains at the side.

Aunt Rebecca had on a striped dimity "short-gown;" old-fashioned for "dressing sack;" she carried a pile of fresh sweet-smelling damask on her arm.

"Your towels, dear; I thought I could come in softly; did I wake you?" The truth was, Aunt Rebecca could not wait any longer for her morning look at the treasure that had been put away, over night, in the "red room." She loved little Say—who would be always little Say to her—as only those gentle souls, who never turn their love on self, and who have few immediate objects, can lavish their hearts upon such few.

"Oh, I was wide awake," said Say; "and have been for this great while. An hour or two. Oh, Aunt Bessie, it is so lovely here! And I'm to stay all—summer!" The words came forth on a long breath of happiness.

Aunt Bessie stooped and kissed the bright eager lips.

"Get up when you like, Say, and begin to enjoy it. There are wheat-cakes and maple syrup for your breakfast. Shall I hang these away?" There was a pile of dresses over the sides and back of the great chair, that

had lain above the linen, in one of the two deep trunks Say had brought up to Hilbury.

“I’ll keep that pink wrapper, auntie, to put on.”

It was a dainty thing, with its rose-coloured sprays dropped over a white ground, its narrow ruffles, italian-ironed, and its open skirt. Say always wore her prettiest—not her finest—at Hilbury. In the first place, nothing else seemed to suit the freshness and bloom about her; then, she loved dearly to *be* one of the pretty things in the world; was that wrong? And then, the dear aunt always looked at her so fondly and admiringly; and the country people turned after her, as they met her by the way; and stopped talking, and clustered nearer as she came up into the church porch of a Sunday. Perhaps it was weak, even reprehensible; but I will tell the whole truth of Say; she had a liking for this,—the young bright thing in her teens. Nobody cared for her so, in Selport; she felt no such warmth around her there. She might be fresh and dainty; though oftener she was costly and elegant—that was her mother’s mistake; but there was something else demanded that she did not reach; that she was at once too shy and too spontaneous to attain. Girls not half so sweet in their girlishness were more certain of themselves, had more style, were more admired; she hovered about, *of* a circle, but not fairly in it; this was what her mother had got for her bargaining away, in her behalf, all else; she felt little in her own eyes, often; her very mother undervalued her, she knew, when she stood alone, for ten minutes, at a crowded party; it was all a conscious eager wrestling after what must come

unlaboured for to be of any worth; here, in Hilbury, there was a place ready for her in all eyes and hearts. She was ten times as "stylish," even as the world pronounces upon style up here among the hills,—she wore her graceful robes here with a better air of grace than in the city. Because the doubt and the constraint, the self-recollection, save as a pleasant, abiding sense of surely pleasing, were all gone. There was no *place* to achieve, no effect to aim at; both were certain. She had here the very thing that gave tone to the bearing of those "born to it" in the metropolitan aristocracy. If her mother could have seen her so, she would have wondered at her ease, her manner—which was only *no* manner; would have wondered that she could not bring it with her to the town. She forgot, or never understood, how she had trained her in her town life to a diseased anxiety and self-distrust.

And Say liked it all; she forgot the old feeling of failure and of secondrateness; she found herself of consequence. Not that she cared to be first, after all; it was, as I said, to be *one* of the things in the world that make its brightness and its beauty, and to be sure of it; to be set among them—not set aside. It is not natural to the young to sigh for pre-eminence; that to them would be a solitude. They gravitate to each other, they tend to troops and beves; it is the more the merrier always; only there must be one pulse among them all, a true community. They like uniforms and bandings, seats in rows, marches in file, dances in ring, songs in chorus. When Say, in her fanciful childhood, had used to endow all insensible

life with the personality of fable,—when she had her myths of trees, and flowers, and stones, and dreamed what it would be like to have been created one of these, her thought was always of one among many; she would not have been a palm, or an aloe, or a cereus, or any grand and solitary, century-blooming thing, if she had known of such. She looked out on the early summer fields, and saw them golden with the buttercups, springing up closely on their slender, elastic stalks, and nodding gaily to each other in the morning sunshine, saying, cheerily, Here we are! and she would have been one of them; one of the midmost on a hillside. She pitied the poor scattered things away out under the walls. They were just as golden, to be sure, but how could they feel it so, any more than she could on the outskirts of the “good society” of Selpot? She did not care to be a *double* buttercup, even here in Hilbury; she did not wear her finest, as I said. But she made herself fresh, and pretty, and dainty. She had nothing else to do, and she found it worth her while; love and admiration gathered round her, and she liked it. She gave it back. The Hilbury girls were fresh and bright and heartsome; quick and intelligent too; and individual, as they were not in the city; nice and delicate, though simple, of array; also, in the hours when she saw them, nicer and more delicate for her being there, though she never thought of that; it was the season in Hilbury when Sarah Gair came up; she brought fashions with her, and did not notice how they followed her appearing; she only thought there was not so great a difference, after all, between these “countrified” folk, as her

mother called them, and the people in the town. The clever adaptiveness which reproduced and reflected new ideas, was so prompt that it did not seem reflective, but simultaneous. The decisive touches and amendments to half the summer apparel in Hilbury were made in the first fortnight after Say unpacked her pretty wardrobe there.

The large, pleasant breakfast room, where the easterly rays struggled in, aslant, through the cherry boughs, seemed full of spring bloom, when Say came down in her rose-coloured wrapper; and she sat there, when she had done eating wheat-cakes and amber syrup, in the delicious after-breakfast feeling that one has, when the long, fair day lies before one, to choose one's pleasure in.

Aunt Rebecca washed the china. Say offered to take a towel, but Rebecca did not care to have her; they had their own way here of doing things, and one of these was *not* the fashion of taking two to do what one could accomplish better alone.

"Plenty of towels and scalding water, and no standing to drain," that was the rule. One thing taken out at a time from the steaming tub, and rubbed to a polish, as the quick vapour dried away from it. Say chatted and looked on.

Presently a slow, shuffling step, in at the end door, and across the wide kitchen, toward them.

Joanna's bright good-morning had a tone of tenderness in it. An old man stood in the open entrance from the kitchen to the breakfast room. An old, bent man, with a mild, asking face; always asking and dreamy; never

lighted with any flash of certain apprehension. He came in, half feeling his way, the added vacancy in his eyes, of one not seeing clearly, passing from the outer sunshine to the shaded room. Say's dress was the brightest thing there; he made straight for that.

"Heaps of posies, whole heaps of posies, and a posy face too," as Say looked up at him, and smiled in his old eyes.

"Jane's child; little Sarah, you know," Joanna said, following in, and speaking with slow gentleness.

"Jane was allers a pretty little gal; yes, proper behaved. No gals to our house; and marm's been gone a great while. Gabriel's a good boy, though; always a good boy, Gabriel."

"Going to the field, father?"

All the village people called old Mr Hartshorne "father;" it is a natural, pitiful way that kindly hearts take toward such feeble folk. Joanna had a sweet accent on the word that was a little different from her ordinary aplomb fashion of speech. When Gabriel was by, though, she never called him so. Many a heart has its little stolen luxury like this.

Gabriel was not far; they all knew that; he never lost the old man long from sight. As for the old man himself, he was safe enough now not to wander widely from his "boy," his boy of five-and-thirty, who, for the twelve last of those years, had never been three days together away from him.

"Going to the field to sow corn," he said, with a childish glee. "I've got it—a whole pocketful." And he shook

the kernels, that rattled crisply one against another as he plunged his fingers among them. "Farmers' gold, Gabriel says. Gabriel gave it to me. Good boy."

"It's a bright day, father." A little flush crept up to Joanna's cheek, as she said this word the second time. She was nearly caught. Gabriel stood at this instant on the door-stone.

He came in in a hearty way. He shook hands with Say, who laid her little white palm in his brown, generous, faithful one, with a reverence, for she knew all his story; all that anybody knew, that is, save Joanna Gayworthy, in her secret memory, and—you and I, reader, of all others in the blind, unconscious world.

Gabriel turned toward Joanna last. These two rarely addressed each other by name. When they did, it was "Gabriel" and "Joanna," simply, as it had been of old, from childhood up. Anything else would have been absurd; but both, with a certain instinct, preferred to find themselves face to face before speaking at all; and they were quick to catch each other's glances; to feel, each the other, by an intuition, when there was a something to be said. There were times, though, when a name was given, for a meaning that was put so, better than in other words. This was rare and beautiful. It stood for thanks, for perfect comprehension, for a thousand things. It was like a caress, that the receiver kept the happiness of for days, reward sufficient for whatever called it forth; the giver never dreaming how dear it had been held. Yet it had been as sweet to give as take. In one thing only these two mistook each other. It was a mistake of long ago

with one; an error of conclusion grown from it and established with the other.

"I looked in to say that we might change hands this morning, if you liked. It's drilling and sowing for us to-day; and if you'd like to break up that south-side piece of the Peakhill lot, you can have Rainer, as well as not, and send Landy to me."

Rainer was a stalwart ploughman, omnipotent with an ox-team. Orlando was a farm-boy of fourteen.

"We should like that, Gabriel—thank you."

The frank acceptance, and the Christian name,—these were the thanks, the recompense; the rest was but a fashion of speech, common to common people.

Gabriel leaned down over the chair in which the old man had seated himself.

"We must make haste now, father," he said. "Farmers' gold won't grow in pockets."

There was no drawing-room lounging in Hilbury. The morning calls were of the shortest.

The old man got up, and put his hand out, feeling for Gabriel's. Gabriel passed his own from the side farthest, and drew his father's up upon his nearer arm. A kindly support, given with a grace, as it might have been to a woman, or to any old and feeble man. Gabriel Hartshorne never treated his childish father as a child.

"That's a good man," said Say, as the two went out of hearing.

"That's the best Christian in Hilbury," said Aunt Joanna, in a way that ended the matter, saying all that could be said.

Gabriel Hartshorne went forth to the field with his old father, and took up his day's work ; the stronger for that moment in Joanna's presence, for that word of hers that he had caught. "It's a bright day, father." So the day wore a new brightness. For that, and because of the other word "Gabriel." On so little may hearts live. God keeps the breath in us, we know not how.

And she? She sang as she had sung at nineteen ; going about the house in her quick, neat, positive way, putting everything in Gayworthy trim, pure, delicate, smiling order. Old maidish? I suppose so, since there were but these two maidens to be the soul of it all, and to dwell in its midst ; since there was such a quietness in the air, such a staying of things after they were put. But whatever the life might look like, it was no stiff and solitary living, narrowed to the placing of a chair, the polishing of a fire-iron. There was a secret joy in it, an untold thought, content to rest so, asking for no more ; yet sure of something that ought to be its own ; that should be, some time, let this world go as it might ; that, meanwhile, none other might so much as touch.

It was the joy God gives us in His waiting-times ;—His music between our acts of life.

Say had her first flitting to do ; out among the chickens,—dozens of little, live puff-balls of golden down, with just one note of faint, tender music breathed into each ; into the shed-chamber, the "play parlour" of old, where some of the self-same bits of pink and blue china were set upon the ledges, against the boards, where she had put them years ago ; a glance out from the

always-open window ; a counting of little white, and black, and motley pigs, that were, at the very moment, scrambling after each other over the bit of meadow, toward the oak-wood ; off thither for their day's pic-nic ; a stroll down through the great barn, between the sweet-smelling maws ; and so out at the south doors, into the spring-meadow ; through this, by the gravelled cart-path, running around two sides, to a bar-place in the far corner, into the old "oak-orchard" away beyond, where the great precipitous gray boulder reared itself in the midst, on the brow of the hill-field, and beside it spread the huge branches of the ancient tree that gave its name to the plantation. A rest here, and a long look over the valley, to the blue misty hills beyond ; a ride on the old apple-bough, her steed in days of yore, standing here, waiting still, like the enchanted horse in the Alhambran legend. Back again, after a while, more slowly ; a peep into dairy and cheese-room ; a delicious pecking, in the old way, at white, tender curd, cut up in cubes, ready for the press ; and, at last, half unwillingly, an acknowledgment of the one "must" of her first bright day of multitudinous delights,—unpacking ; she had all this to fill up the quick morning hours, and bring round the dinner-time, before she had really settled what to do with the day at all.

"Shall we go to cousin Wealthy's this afternoon?" she asked of the aunts, sitting down with them to boiled chicken and dandelions ; the "cruel dinner," that she had called it in her childhood, loving the door-side pets and the field-flowers so ; yet finding it very nice for all, as she had then, with its garnishing of fresh eggs that lay like

inlaid gold and ivory upon the dark greens ; and its delicate sauce of new, sweet butter, melted into cream again, from the very churn. "Shall we go to Cousin Wealthy's and see Aunt Prue?"

"I promised to drive over to Winthorpe, one day this week," said Rebecca, "and this is Friday. We may not have so good a day to-morrow. And Stacy will have been looking for us."

"The church and the steeple, and all the good people,
And yet she complains that her hands are not full,"

said Aunt Joanna, merrily. "Did you ever find out, Say, that a leisure day gets crowded fuller of business, in the end, than any other? It's just so with an old maid's life. Bessie wasn't satisfied with being the chief spoke in the wheel in Hilbury parish ; but she must take Winthorpe Parsonage under her wing, besides. Stacy King has got a flock, you see. It's very meritorious to have a flock, particularly because it provides something for your friends to do. So the minister came over here, one day, five or six years ago, whimpering. Stacy was greatly burdened, and very feeble ; she was lonely, too ; she wanted some friend to cheer her up, and would one of us go over. Of course we would ; people that haven't got husbands and flocks never have anything else to do but to go everywhere and do everything, and all at a time. So Bessie went ; and when she once begins on a thing, she takes it right into her life, and makes a place for it ; and, after that, it's never off the docket. She's like the man I saw in Selpot, with the dinner-plates. One more never makes any difference. She keeps them all spinning, turn

by turn. And to-day's the day, it seems, for spinning Winthorpe. So you'll have to go there, if anywhere."

"That's beautiful. I like going to Winthorpe. It's so lovely down that old street, so broad and green, with just a track in the middle, and the great elms reaching overhead. I'm glad you didn't go before, Aunt Bessie."

"You needn't be under any alarm," said Joanna. "There'll be opportunities enough. What with Stacy's ailments, and the vicissitudes of the flock,—seven of them, Say!—there's always an errand. Bessie goes one day, to find out what she's to go for next. Last winter, they kept her busy with hooping-cough; the spring before, it was measles; and when the parsoness gets pulled down herself, she goes and stays. That's every six months or so."

Rebecca only smiled. There was no open wound, now, to be touched with Joanna's raillery. Joanna had no suspicion there had ever been one. Their two lives ran on, side by side, each holding its own mystery. Such is sisterhood, and friendship, for the most part.

By two o'clock, the comfortable two-seated waggon was rolling along the downhill roads that led easterly to the Chinsittimic and Winthorpe. It was four when they came into the large, yet rural, river town. It was beautiful, as Say had said. Built on the wide, level meadow-reaches, it had, in place of the narrow, winding road that creeps from village to village, among the hills, a broad magnificent green street, running parallel to the river. Back from this, rods apart, stood the houses; odd and antique, many of them; for Winthorpe was an early settlement, and its fine academy was an old foundation.

There were gambrel-roofs, and overhanging upper stories ; queer, one-sided roofs, with slope from ridge-pole to door-post, behind, and a mere flap in front, above the fair, two-story elevation ; deep porticoes and low stoops ; all varieties of primitive New England architecture. Over all, trees older than the houses.

Up a turf yard, to the side porch, hung with trails and sweeps of woodbine just growing tender with new green, they came to the Parsonage entrance.

The pale, worn preacher saw them from his study window, and came out to take their horse. Stacy ran from some minor domestic sanctum, picking up a child by the way, and gave them greeting at the door.

"This is real good of you, and to bring Say too," she said ; "I've been looking for you all the week."

Stacy Lawton had no time now for puffs and vanities ; if not given up, they had been crowded aside. Her bright hair was put back over her ears, not quite unrumped ; the baby had been tugging at it ; her face was thin, her eyes looked large, a side-tooth was gone that showed a gap in the pretty mouth when she smiled as she did now ; yet her smile was sweeter somehow, when it came, than it had been in the old, gay, careless days, when it had won Gordon King. The corners of her lips drooped into a quiet gravity after the smile faded ; there was a line between the eyebrows that told of perplexities, very like of petulance. Stacy had had a hard school to learn in.

You could have seen what Rebecca Gayworthy had been to her, by the look she turned and rested on her, when she had got her indoors, and taken away her bon-

net;—what she had been in the household, by the very baby springing to her arms, as soon as it saw her face, and caught her voice;—what Gordon King thought, when he came in and found her so, as he reached out his wan white hand, for a renewed grasp of welcome. But only God, and the secret hearts of these two, knew all that she had been.

The line had begun to come in Stacy's forehead many years ago, when the first illusion of mere earthly love had faded, and the cares came in that thrust the husband and wife apart. This time arrives, with the demands of earnest life, in some phase, to every pair. Every Adam and Eve must leave their early Paradise behind them; and while it lies there like a dream, turn from it to the wilderness that spreads, wide and unrelenting, all before. When Gordon King and Stacy stood so, in their wilderness, an angel came to them.

Only she and Stacy knew the words that had been said between them that day, long ago, in her first visit, as they sat in the two low chairs by the nursery fire; nursery and mother's room, as well, when Stacy flung down, with a sudden, reckless impatience, the insufficient pattern of cloth from which she had been trying to contrive a little coat, and, with the stirring of a pebble, the whole pent-back stream poured forth.

"It's always so! I never tried to save, by making a thing do that wouldn't do, but I ended in wasting the whole. It's miserable trying to get something out of nothing. And that's what my whole life has been. There wasn't enough stuff in the beginning. And now

it's all cut up, and there's nothing made of it after all. I've worried, and tugged, and strained, and lost my good nature, and my strength, and my good looks, and all I had to make anybody care for me; and I'm cross, and old, and good for nothing, and spoilt!" And she put her two hands against her forehead, and leaned down helplessly, and cried.

"You've done what God gave you to do, Stacy; don't say there's nothing made of it."

"I haven't. And He didn't give it to me. I took it. Rebecca Gayworthy, you know that."

Rebecca was silent at that for a half-minute. Then she came near, and laid her arm over Stacy's neck—the thin shoulders, that had been so round and shapely once, quivering now with the soul-pain that sent itself through the flesh, and said tenderly—

"You took what you were made so as to long for, and what He let lie in your way. We can get nothing that He does not give. It is yours,—this life,—because you needed it."

"And I am not fit for it, Rebecca. I feel sometimes 'as if I had cheated my husband. And, Lord help me! sometimes I think he feels so too. I think he almost turns from me, and gives me up. And yet I did mean to be so good! It wasn't a pretence; but my religion was like all the rest. There never was stuff enough. I tried to make it do, but it fell short."

"We don't have it all at once, Stacy. It grows, as life grows. Out of all these things, perhaps it is coming to you more and more."

"If I thought that! But no; it's punishment. I wanted to be religious, because he was; because I couldn't be a minister's wife without it; because I loved him so! And I felt sure that with him I could be anything. I thought he would always help me. But he's had other people to help; and I've had my separate work to do. And when a person is once supposed to have got religion, it's taken for granted to be for good and all. Or else they've been hypocrites and pretenders. I suppose that's what I've been; but I didn't mean it, Bessie; I believed in myself then."

"And why not now, Stacy? What reason have you to doubt?"

"O Bessie! it don't hold! It gives way with every strain that comes upon it. I haven't any strength, nor any patience. I'm cross with my husband, and cross with my children. And I care just as much for vanities as ever, only I can't get them. It makes me angry to see my face in the glass, all pinched and pale, and to have to wear that old straw bonnet, with the brown ribbon ironed out. And—it's gospel truth, Bessie, though he's a good man—he isn't half so patient himself with me, as he was when I was pretty."

"Don't you tell him your troubles and temptations? Don't you pray God, together, for help?"

"Of course, we have family prayers, when Dorcas comes in; there's hardly a chance, now, for anything else, with all his time so taken up, and the babies wanting me every hour. And prayers—it's dreadful, but they do—make me feel further away from him than ever, and from God,

too, when, perhaps, I've been fretful and tired all day long. O Bessie! I want to be taken up and comforted!"

Rebecca drew the tired head, the pale face, down upon her shoulder.

"You're worn out, dear. It's that. You mustn't find fault with the soul for the ails of the body. You don't sleep well, poor child, do you?"

The tender words, the "poor child," the nestling down into a friendly bosom, with these, Stacy sobbed, in a gentle, passive, grieved way, as a baby might.

"I haven't had a whole night's rest in all these five years past. Sometimes not a whole hour. I've had my arms full, night and day, when I wanted to be in arms myself, and tended."

She breathed it out, brokenly, between the sobs.

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. We are only left to feel the other, that we might feel this,—'Flesh and heart faileth, but God is the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever.' Think that He is teaching you this, Stacy, and be willing to learn His lesson. But never think that He has left you, or given you over."

"Oh, that is what I have been afraid of," murmured Stacy.

"If the life had gone out of you, you could not have been afraid. It is the flesh that is weak, and for that we must take care of you, somehow."

"God bless you, Rebecca Gayworthy! You *do* take me up and comfort me. And to think it should be *you*!"

"Hush, hush, dear."

"She needs change and rest."

Rebecca had said so to the minister down-stairs, after prayers, that same night, when Stacy had gone up early, with the baby.

"Next month,"—the next month would be October, and Rebecca knew that then the baby would begin its little independent life, and the mother might be spared from it, —next month, would not Mrs Fairbrother come over and stay, and let me have Stacy a while at the farm? Annie and Gordie should come, too. That would make it easier here, and they should not tease Stacy.

The minister turned, with a quick, grateful look.

"You shall take your own way with us all. You are a true friend, Miss Rebecca."

"Being so, may I say one thing more—that only a true friend should say?"

"Whatever you please."

"Do you remember what you spoke of when you first came to tell us that this home was to be? Of the help she needed? 'Her feet,' you said, 'are newly set in the upward way.' Hasn't it been harder for her, sometimes, than you have thought, perhaps, with all these cares coming about her?"

"Have I been hard upon her? Does she think that?"

"No," said Rebecca. "But I am afraid she is hard upon herself, because of little failures. I think she needs help and cherishing that way; more than she did then, in her first hopefulness. I think she needs to feel nearer to her husband and his strength than ever."

Rebecca said this low, timidly, as going to the very verge of her friendly right.

Gordon King regarded her intently. His voice altered, and he partly turned away again as he answered her.

"My strength is a poor thing," he said. "I have had my failures, too. I laid my hands on life presumptuously, before I knew what sort of matter it was. I took it upon me to lead others, when, God knows, I wanted leading most of all myself. I wasn't fit to care for Stacy, poor child."

"Yet her very love of God went up through you ! And now, she is afraid. Don't leave her alone !"

All the tenderness of the old days, of the starlit evening when Stacy had told him first, "She was not good, she was afraid ;" when it had seemed so sweet to help her, to lift his soul to heaven for hers ; when he had thought he could be strong for both, came back suddenly as he heard these words. A loftiness and strength came also to him, from the loftiness he recognised in her who spoke them. A new, generous love toward the wife for whom the old, first, passionate love, even, had borrowed a tender reverence, carried unconsciously from his thought of this woman—this friend—who was too high for him now, as she had been then ; who strengthened him, standing by ; from whose presence he could bear strength to the other, —his own,—waiting for it. There are women who are born for ministry like this, not receiving unto themselves ever, save from God ; giving out, always.

Gordon King thought of his wife as she had been in those old days, in her sweet girlishness that any beautiful womanhood might grow from ; with her fresh, bright-

smile, that grew brighter always for him ; when her very little pettishness and vanities were like the spring breeze that tosses up a perfume—he thought of the weary mother above there, hushing her weary child. He felt life had been hard for her. It had been hard for him, but its hardness should not have thrust between them so. Tears and prayers should not have been so locked away in two separate souls. Please God, his yet young flower should grow bright again.

“ I will not leave her alone. God forgive me if I have done so ! ”

He held out his hand to Rebecca as he rose. He grasped hers hard. “ God has sent a help to us both,” said he, tremulously.

“ And that it should be you ! ” That was what his heart smote him with also, secretly, though he spoke it not. The under-life that never had been spoken, that lay between these three, through the power of this Rebecca had touched them both—the husband and the wife. It was possible for her alone, her purchased right. At her hand they must take help. Was it gift of grace, or coals of fire—gift of God’s love, as comes with all scorch and pain, though we have earned the pain only ?

The minister went up-stairs. The baby was hushed away in the cradle. He and Stacy were alone.

Rebecca sat below, wistful of a beginning of new joy for them,—a joy she had helped to make, that she also entered into.

I think it was the very “ joy of her Lord,” of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

More than six years ago, that was—six years wherein, quietly and faithfully, Rebecca Gayworthy had taken Winthorpe Parsonage “right into her life, and made a place for it,” wherein there had grown to be no other consciousness any more between her and it than that of a gentle, happy friendliness. Till to-day, because of her, there was here a life toilsome but peaceful; there were hearts weary often, but undistrustful; love chastened, calm, patient; here, where wreck of heart, and faith, and life had threatened till to-day, a cheeriness lighted itself up about her as she came in, so that Sarah Gair, entering after her, felt on the very threshold the soul of the whole story.

Joanna had been set down in Shop Row. She had some errands to do, and an old school-friend to see. Afterwards she came to the Parsonage; and then it made itself evident that, for all her sauciness, she had taken up a cheery little mission of her own here none the less.

There were sugar-plums in her bag, and the children instigated them afar off like flies. She popped them into their mouths as they stood about her knees, holding up defiantly now and then before the parson’s eyes a glowing red or lucid amber bit as she came to it. The parson usually approved only of white, unflavoured candies for his children, when, poor souls, they happened to get any at all; but that was neither according to Joanna’s hygiene or philosophy.

“They’re made to like pretty colours,” she said. “We needn’t poison them, to be sure; but the bright sugar tastes the sweetest for all that, and it takes a little essence of something to help the double refinements down.”

So, after the sweetmeats came stories—truth essenced for them upon the like principle—white light broken up into rainbows. Aunt Joanna told magnificent stories. She went on to-day with a wonderful serial about a cat, who exceeded in the brilliancy of her adventures all the cats of fable ; in their fundamental morality also, since she never lied, or stole, or slew impunibly, but was trained gradually, by the discipline of consequences, even as little humans, toward truth, and honesty, and mercy. And the story never came to a final end, any more than life does ; she was never declared to have been “good and happy ever after ;” there was always “more for next time.” Aunt Joanna knew “Mother Goose” too from beginning to end ; and she sang the old rhymes in her clear, beautiful voice, to improvised melodies of her own, sometimes gleeful as laughter, sometimes sweet and touching as old church tunes. The others dropped their talk often, and listened to her inventions as well as to her songs ; the grave minister laughed at her oddities ; and Stacy, declaring that there was never any chance of rationality after Joanna Gayworthy came in, was met by the avowal that it was precisely what she came for—to shake them up and unsettle them out of their primness, and give them all the trouble she could in getting back to it again. She was like a breeze that set everything fluttering, and left the whole house freshened after she had passed on.

Then, as they drove slowly homeward over the hills, she took up her pranks of satire again.

“ I’ve found it out, and it’s something for an old maid to discover ! Marriage goes by the Rule of Three. A

wants a third prop
 they're both of
 the main thing;
 both one object;
 somebody that's as
 the other. That
 that couple it's
 both, as much
 as the house-
 establishment."
 she always did
 away joy in it,
 one who hears
 of her own life-
 calm, from all
 they can't manage
 Aunt Rebeccas
 about the other
 all, most of 'em,
 there's plenty of
 I don't believe
 to me you're
 body."
 of other places.
 manage. I bor-
 what I go to
 know when old

Mrs Gibson has had the bows turned on her black Navarino, and it makes me feel just as comfortable for her as she does for herself; and it's nice to get a glimpse of Eunice, when she isn't tailloressing; and to think how she's resting, with her gloves on, and her hands folded. And I like to see when the Newcombe girls are home from Manchester on a visit, and to watch their mother's eyes. I don't know but her pride is as pious as most folk's prayers. And to see the different looks on different faces when a hymn's given out, or the Bible's read, or something special is said in a sermon. You can tell half that ever happened to people if you didn't know it before, and pretty nearly what's come of it all. Yes, Say, I'm a gossip; week-days and Sundays a clear gossip. Old maids generally are when they aren't saints, like Becsie. And a gossip isn't a bad thing either, if you leave out the tattling part. I looked the word out in Johnson one day. It comes from God-sibb—God-relation. It's what He puts between us in this world. And most of my religion, I think, if I've got any, comes by relation, by feeling other people's experiences. I'd rather see a good face, and know of a good thing done, than to hear a twenty-headed sermon about it."

Not a word in all this of Mrs Prouty, as of old; there had been no sarcasm either upon Stacy; something in the years had touched Joanna's quickness with a broader kindliness.

Say remembered this talk afterward, on a Sunday, sitting by Aunt Joanna in the old square pew; Joanna had left the singing-gallery years ago, when there only remained

Rebecca and herself of all the Gayworthys, to sit together. Say thought of her words, and her Sunday "gossip," seeing Gabriel Hartshorne—the "best Christian in all Hilbury"—in the pew before; seeing him find the chapter and hymn for his old father, and hold the book for him to look on; seeing him pick up his hat for him when the service was over, and the people going out, and lead him down the aisle, slowly, leaning on his strong, tender arm. She saw the light in Joanna's eyes, looking on all this as they walked after; when Gabriel would have drawn back, to let them pass more quickly, and she refused to hasten by, but kept a reverent step behind; when, afterward, in the churchyard, they came near the old man and the younger one, pausing at a white-tableted grave.

"Hepsibah Hartshorne," the stone said, "aged 54." Joanna Gayworthy pressed Say's arm and drew her on. But she had seen Gabriel give to his father a little nosegay of spring-flowers. And the old man smiled, and laid it on the grave.

"She's 'way off,—an' it's a long time! But she knows we don't forget her Sunday posy, Gabe!"

Gabriel bent his head, and a strange sweet smile came over his face; a shining intentness into its lines, as of one to whom a far, glad, solemn utterance comes, that is not for all. Some faint beautiful likeness I think it must have borne to the look that rested once on the one Divine countenance, when the Voice breathed, "My beloved Son! in whom I am well pleased."

Her Sunday posy, brought to her, even yet, by loving

hands. In the tall-growing grass lay many such already,—drying away there, week by week.

“Do they always do that?” Say whispered.

And Joanna answered, in a hushed way, as speaking of something holy,—“Always.”

Even in a blank like this, a music. Sweet-dropping notes, summer by summer measuring the time, between far-parted acts of an old man’s helpless life.

Aunt Joanna sat, through the afternoon service, with her head upon her hand. Her face was paler than at morning, and there was, now and then, a look of wistful pain about the eyes. Say leaned toward her once, taking her little smelling bottle from her pocket. A quick motion of Joanna’s hand said plainly, Nonsense! and with a queer little quiver of the mouth, she pulled down her veil over the front of her bonnet, and turned away.

“What was the matter, Auntie?” asked Say, afterward, when they came out.

“Matter? Goosie!” replied Joanna; “why, I sat looking at Senath Spring’s new bonnet, with the cape all on one side, till it gave me the toothache! Nobody knows what I have to go through with the Hilbury millinery!”

CHAPTER III.

THEN AND NOW.

JOANNA was out in the front yard, sowing her last annuals in the little beds under the parlour windows. Say stood behind her with the basket of seeds.

“Now, the nasturtiums!”

While Say had her fingers among the paper bags—rattle-te-clash! down came a country waggon to the gate. ‘Siah Ford, factotum, from the Hoogs’s place.

“Cap’n Vorse’s got home!”

Joanna jumped up and turned round, and Say thrust into her hand a big brown parcel of pumpkin seeds.

“Gershom! When?”

“Las’ night. Much as ever, though. Ship all but went down in a hurricane.”

Then the two women turned pale, as if the news had come this end foremost, with the “all but” left out; and, in an instant, stood at the foot of the grass-path—basket, trowel, pumpkin-seeds, and all.

“‘Siah Ford!” cried Joanna, clutching the paper parcel in one hand, till the pumpkin seeds began to ooze through its lower end, and slide down into the grass, while she threatened him with the trowel in the other—“whatever

—in—the—world—do—you—mean?" Saying these words very deliberately and emphatically, with the little catches between as designated, she sowed at least three pumpkins to the syllable.

'Siah Ford looked her in the face solemnly.

"Sartin true—black 'n blue—give you leave ter cut m' in two."

"Not the *Ceres*?"

"Ser-is? Yes, I tell yer! Can't *nuthin* make yer b'lieve a feller?"

"The ship *Ceres*? You know what I mean. Say, make him tell!"

"SHIP *Ceres*? Oh, lor, no! I remember now. No, 'twan't the *Ceres*; they left her, long shore, somewheres, out there in Indy; stoppin' fer iv'ry or sunthin'—he'll tell yer. But the short on't is, he's cap'n; an' I rather guess he's airnt his ship. One they put him aboard of, too, to bring home. The cap'n died out there. 'Tall belonged t' the same concern. 'Spose likely I don't take in the hull on't; but from what I c'n pick up 'bout it he's done sunthin' 'r other pesky smart, Cap'n Vorse has, or less he wouldn't be here."

Sarah Gair's eyes flashed a great proud gladness, as she stood and listened.

"Something smart!" Oh, she knew! Some brave, grand thing, such as Gershom had always meant to do. Now, it had come! Now, he was a hero! And this noble thing—this glory—it was hers, partly, also; because she had been in the secret, in the old days, when it was only a dream—when he first wanted to go to sea,

and talked, out there on the big rock, under the yellow plum-tree, of what he would do, if he ever got to be a man and a sailor. Her hands trembled, holding the willow basket; the full, brilliant colour swept up and deepened in her cheek, till it glowed, palpitated, like a flame.

Aunt Joanna had not quite got over her little paleness at the shock and the astonishment. At thirty-three the blood does not pulse back and forth with such suddenness as at nineteen.

"Why, child," she cried, turning round to Say, "you're illuminated!"

With that, she sowed the last of the pumpkins in a new spot, and was never the wiser. How they came there, under the maples, she wondered, a month or two later.

'Siah Ford had driven round into the chip-yard; Rebecca was coming up from the barn, with a basket of eggs. Do the best they could, the women must go back through the house to meet her; so he would be first with his news. This was his business to-day, with every soul he could waylay in Hilbury. Nothing else under the sun had brought him down from the farm, with his horse and empty waggon. There was meal waiting at the mill, to be sure; and he was going for it—by and by, if he didn't forget it. This is the way they carry tidings in Yankee land; much like the "bended bow and the voice" of Highland warfare, only without the avowed purpose. There is always meal at the mill.

He "couldn't stop to talk over partick'lers; must come

up to our 'us, an' hear all about it. Cap'n was smart, an' so was the widders."

And the bended bow and the voice passed on toward Hartshorne's, and so to the Bridge.

Dinner at twelve. Half an hour earlier than the Gay-worthy went. At one, a grand council of one, in the red room, with bolted door, over four dresses.

The purple jaconet was fresh and new; but then the pink muslin was so bright and becoming; too dressy, perhaps, with its four little flouncings. Gershom hated finery so. Oh, dear! if one could only look one's prettiest, without keeping the reason why in sight! The dark-blue foulard was what she would naturally have put on for a common drive over to Cousin Wealthy's; and it would grow cool at dusk. But oh, dear no! that would never do for *this* occasion. An old thing—and mourning somewhere, over there on the other side the world, besides. And he just home, alive and well, by a hairbreadth 'scape, and who knows what marvel of courage! If she could have ventured on the white;—but that was too manifest a getting up.

These first days of June had been summer in fact as well as name; but up here, among the mountains, people were slow in coming to trust the summer—to the extent of white muslin. Say turned back to the purple lawn; good sense and good taste compromised upon this. She huddled the other dresses into the press, and pulled her hair down with one hand, while she unfastened the door with the other. Aunt Rebecca was outside, come to see if she were ready. The hair must come down and go up again,

though Aunt Rebecca would not have seen the necessity.

"In five minutes, aunty! If you come in, I shall get chattering; just go off, like a dear, and I won't be any time!"

But Rebecca and Joanna waited twenty minutes talking with Mary Makepeace, who came in for a pitcher of yeast, and to hear more, or over again, about it all. Then they began to call up the stairs, and called alternately for five minutes longer; and then at last the little lady came down. Not gay, not fine, but somehow things could not be fresh on her without proclaiming their freshness; there is such a difference in women about this; and from the straight white line between the dark waving bands of her hair, to the tip of the little black gaiter-boot, she was finished, and *just* finished, marvellously.

"Isn't your dress too thin?"

"Oh, Aunt Bessie, this jaconet! Why, it's as thick as pasteboard. It's only a nice kind of calico."

"I don't know, it isn't out of the common, to be sure, when you come to examine; and yet—it looks—well, if it was unbleached sheeting, I suppose you'd bloom out in it!" Aunt Joanna's slight doubt worked itself off so, with an accent of pride and a loving little tip of the chin, lifting up a bright face and graceful head, that could but have bloomed, truly, from whatever sort of calyx.

It was only a simple white grounded lawn, spotted thickly with tiny purple pansies; but there were dainty puffings about waist and sleeves, and delicate lace at the throat; and altogether, she might have gone so to a

ball, and looked lovely, or come down to breakfast in it, equally lovely and defiant of criticism.

Sarah Gair and Gershom Vorse had not met for five years past. Then it had been at Hilbury, as now, when she was fourteen and he twenty. He was mate of a vessel then, sailing from New York ; Blackmere was in the same ship, second officer. The old *Pearl* had been sold away ; she went into smaller, coastwise trade. Blackmere loved the brig, but he loved Gershom Vorse better. Gershom must rise, it was his duty in life, and he had chances—education, which was the greatest chance of all. Blackmere cared for no advancement, whether he could have got it or not ; he barnacled himself to Gershom now, and shipped with him always. Gershom looked out for that, and carried his point or gave up all the rest. They had been in the *Ceres* ; last, round the north-west coast for sandal-wood and furs, home by China to load with teas and silks. Gershom had seen the world—a sailor's sight of it—over and over.

And Say had lived on in her world—half-a-dozen streets, a couple of score of drawing-rooms—four houses, perhaps, where she was intimate enough to go up-stairs when there was no party. This world of hers opened out toward the great hills, though ; this had saved her from utter narrowness and stagnation. And she had books ; but they were to her life what Gershom's sailor books had been to the great sea ; *that* lay all beyond, in its might and mystery, transcending dreams.

Could these two join their sympathies at the point where their intercourse had broken off ? Could they stand again

at that instant of hope and resolve, and look, in the light of it, at this moment of achievement? Hope and achievement never are so joined. The years and the labour lie between. It was a boy of thirteen that had lain on the gray rock under the plum-tree, asking Say, the child of seven, what the sea was like. It was a man of twenty-five, who had traversed the hemispheres, and measured his manhood against the elements, who came home to-day, with a deed in his life, where a resolve had been.

Say, who had had "all these years longer to be a little girl," had achieved, it seems, nothing but her growth, her bloom, and her woman-garb. Nothing else that Gershom could apprehend. She could but put on her pansy-robe, and come to him so with her best.

She could go back. Those moments under the plum-tree were fresh and vivid to her. It was to her as if Gershom had leapt from that to this,—as if, an instant ago, he had said, I will do this,—as if, without conscious pause, she could cry to him exultingly, O Gershie! it is done!

She thought, too, in her secret heart, that she *had* achieved something. To have grown into her womanliness and beauty, as he into his manliness and daring,—was this nothing? Would he not be pleased to see her as she was to-day? This her little feminine—what-you-please—gave a warmer glow to her anticipation.

And what came of it?

A grasping of hands, a greeting of words, a great asking of questions, brief sailorly answers; a making light of whatever he had done, a holding back of the very thing Say secretly felt a share in.

He talked more to the aunts than to her. Once she caught a stray glance, something of the old, measuring look, taking her in, from the little violet neck-ribbon to the hem of the wide-floating summer dress,—that made her feel suddenly flimsy before him, the stout, brave fellow in rough, dark blue, with hair tossed in an unconscious grace, and eyes that looked straight on,—that she could not fancy ever had stopped short at a self-image. Well! would he have her dowdy? A woman must do something to herself. It would be more painstaking to make herself a fright!

So she lifted up her head, in a little assured, defiant way, as one who could not help it, and really did not care much, that she *were* young and pretty,—the youngest and prettiest there. Also, there must be a first time of putting on anything, even a jaconet with purple pansies.

She got away into the dairy by and by, with Cousin Wealthy, going to skim the cream for tea.

“He doesn’t tell us half,” said she.

“He isn’t much for glorifyin’! He won’t go round tellin’ it over and over. He told his mother last night, and I suppose he thinks that’s enough.”

“But you know. Oh, do tell me, Cousin Wealthy, all about it!”

“I couldn’t. It takes a sailor. They were on their beam ends, and the Lord knows what. And the sea made a clean breach, and they were knocked about amongst lee-scuppers, and cabooses, and things; and two men were washed overboard. And the top main-mast went, and they cut away the rigging, and they drove before the wind

till morning. And then the gale went down, but there was a great leak, and the men were for getting off in the boats. But the *Captain*, that's Gershom, you know,"—Say nodded,—“and the mate, that's Blackmere, his great friend, said no; they should stick by the ship and the women. There were two women-passengers, one of 'em the cap'n's widow, and the other was a sick lady coming home from Calcutta. So at that the men were 'shamed, and made up their minds to stick by, too. And they worked away at the pumps; and after a while they found the leak; and they patched and rigged up again, somehow; and they had pleasant weather, and they came on. And they say Gershie saved the ship, from first to last. It was all in the paper he brought home in his pocket, but when he'd shown it to his mother, he just took it and poked it under the kitchen-fire, as cool as you please. I think it kinder worked her, not to have it to put away; but she was prouder of him for his doin' it, after all. *She* don't *talk* about it; but she goes round *looking*—as if 'nobody was corporal but your father and I!’”

“Oh, belay, Cousin Wealthy! Do you think a yarn's the better for so much over-spinning?”

The captain himself said this, coming in suddenly at the door between kitchen and dairy.

Cousin Wealthy looked a little abashed—an amateur caught meddling with his art by a professional—and wondered how much he had heard, and how much she *had* mixed up the sea-phrases. Say dropped the spoon with which she had been stirring together a whole five-quart pan of milk with its twelve-hours' rising of cream, while

she listened to the story,—and made a spring toward him.

“O Gershie!” she cried. “I knew it! I always knew you would!”

“Pshaw!” said the sailor; but he did not say it roughly, and he could but take, for a moment, the two little hands stretched out to him in eager enthusiasm. The next instant they were dropped, and Say burned all over at the thought of her own forwardness.

All Captain Vorse did to help her, was to walk off, first, out of the dairy.

“If he isn’t easier scared than pleased,” said Cousin Wealthy to herself, in an amaze, “no wonder beam-ends couldn’t start him!”

Fine and affected! That was what he thought of her. That was what she had done with her purple ribbons and puffs, and her gladness, and her pride in him. People *do* feel things in their bones, or *more* interiorly. Sarah Gair was sure of this, though Gershom had given her neither word nor look that she could quite charge with proof of it; though he had just treated her like anybody else. Ah, that was it! The old time was gone, and their relation in it. She had no claim, after all; no share, beyond others, in this man-work of his, though she had listened to his boy-dreams, and left her play for them; though she had first shown him the sea, and made him free of the wonderful *Pearl*. He was no longer Gershie, though she did forget and call him so, and put her hands out to him in that ridiculous way that he only “pshawed” at, and didn’t care for the feeling of: he was a great, brown, whis-

kered sea-captain ; he never once called her Say ; what a fool she was ! How her breath quickened, and her face tingled, as she thought of it, riding home silently with the aunts in the dusky evening !

She knew she had looked stiff and silly ; she had not been herself ; she could not do herself justice in his presence ; she was so afraid—had always been—of his contempt.

It had ended miserably, this glad day.

At the same moment, Captain Gershom Vorse was driving away the thought of how bright and pretty the girl had looked, with her glad, eager way, and her outstretched hands, and her proud congratulation, spoken in eye and colour, more than in word, with another “pshaw !” mental, and more emphatic.

He did not believe in her, he did not want to believe in her ; she was Jane Gair’s child ; she had been brought up to that vain, pretentious city-life ; she was sham, like all of it. And she wore puffed muslin, and dainty boots, and looked like a thing in a shop-window.

At the best, what business had such as Aunt Jane and she in a world like this, where there were poverty and nakedness, crime, and pain, and danger ?—where the weak were wronged, and the miserable trampled under foot, and the ignorant sat in darkness ? Going up and down the earth, had he not seen all this, he at twenty-five, even ? Living among rough, rude, brave, generous, coarse, vicious, ill-used men, how had he come to think of paltry life like theirs ?

What would Ned Blackmere say to such a woman—

the rough, stalwart, sterling fellow, whom the world had handled so fiercely, had battered and banged about, but had never banged the truth and courage out of—who would stand by him, in his grand loyalty of friendship, to the last plank?

“You’ve got a mother, boy; make much of her, but take care of your bones, and keep clear of the rest!”

He remembered that Blackmere had said this, the man who had had sister and wife. So he weighed by a harsh standard, and judged with a bitter judgment, borrowed from this man of sterner, harder experience, the girl-life of nineteen years.

Yet this very weighing and judging, what did it prove? That he himself was but twenty-five, after all. That he could not put away, without much thought, this image of his little playmate, Say. He might have been harder, he might have let her alone.

CHAPTER IV.

BROWN BREAD.

SOMETHING was very pleasant, something was horribly uncomfortable.

These two flashes of sensation, or recollection, in such quick succession as to seem mingled, roused Say, next morning, to complete wakefulness, after the first faint creeping back of consciousness, whereby the stray elements of existence concentrated themselves, and made her aware, first, of her body lying on the bed, then, of the life she lived in it, whose thread was to be taken up again.

This mystery of sleep ! This greater mystery of waking ! If we could fathom them, we should have fathomed ourselves, and life and death !

From the child who goes to bed with his last new toy hugged to his bosom, or his new shoes by the bed-side, to the man or woman, with the last deep joy or mighty grief that is to lie still a while and be lost, only for an intenser grasp upon the whole soul when the soul re-gathers itself, a world of human being vanishes nightly into the great unknown, and orbs itself again into myriad identities at the recall of day ; as the stars were born out of darkness when the Voice said, Let there be light !

To begin where each left off. With the hope—the plan—the unfolding knowledge, to be taken up as it was dropped. Grand or trivial,—base or beneficent; involving an hour's pastime,—a revelation of science,—a crime completed,—a nation's fate,—a soul's salvation,—human thought, interest, purpose, whatever it may be, recovers itself out of the pause and darkness, returning inevitably unto its own.

Gershom was come back. The old days could never come back. She was glad; she was disappointed; she was pained, puzzled, ashamed; a little resentful. She bit her lip, and pressed her face down into her pillow, as a certain quick spasm of keen re-sufferance came over her.

She did not care; she had done nothing wrong,—nothing to be ashamed of. Only—she would never do it again!

Life moved forward in its simple channel. To-day need not necessarily continue at once the chief interest of yesterday. That lives, but bides its time.

The day broadened. Breakfast was done. Say and Aunt Joanna sat in the south chamber window, with a little old-fashioned light-stand between them, holding their bits of work; and it happened that they held a talk together, touching by chance upon a certain other interest in Sarah's life, not wholly detached from, or irrelative to, the rest. Nothing is. In human history, there is, really and strictly, no such thing as an episode.

It was Joanna's window, the very one wherein the flutter of white draperies and the shining of the night-candle had been watched, years ago, and might be still

from that other window opening this way, in the farmhouse gable down the road. Joanna loved this window. Had this and that to do with each other? She made her customary seat here. Every woman who loves womanly work has her nook wherein to do it. Turn her out of it and she is all astray, like a bird with her nest broken up. The brown light-stand, with the work-basket and the Bible, stood here always. And there was a holy time at night, when the answering gleam came from the red gable, when, without ever a word of knowledge, two hearts told themselves of the one thought that held them both; two children of God felt themselves one in Him; their souls finding each other before Him. Non-professors these, both of them; hardly reckoned among the elect, according to old Church rules, here in Hilbury; yet the one, looking at the life of the other, divined its secret spring, and said of him, "That's the best Christian in Hilbury;" and the heart of the other hallowed the woman he had loved, and, thinking of her nightly prayer, he sent up his own to heaven beside it. So their feet walked separate paths; but their spirits went God-ward hand in hand.

It is not the sunshine, or any other tangible why, that accounts for the pleasantness of old house corners. It is the pureness and the pleasantness that have clustered there; the very walls have drunk these in. Shall the leaven of pest lurk and infect, and these escape? The air of an old home is full of their beneficent contagion.

Say could not have told the reason; but she was always especially peaceful and cheery in this particular south

window. It wrought with her now; the current of her thoughts was turned. Her spirits reacted

"I wish I had been born in the country, and always lived here," she said. "I think it would have made more of me. People's lives are real here, and everybody has one of their own."

Aunt Joanna lifted her eyebrows a little.

"And not in the city?" she said.

"Not half so much. For the most part, they seem to be trying to get into other people's lives. And then everybody makes up their minds to all sponge-cake," Say said, laughing. She had never forgotten that misdeemeanour of her childhood. It had grown into a proverb of experience with her.

"And the sponge-cake don't go round?"

"No," said Say. "And, oh dear! I've been so hungry sometimes for plain brown bread!"

Under the parable, Joanna knew very well what the child meant.

"It's my low taste, perhaps. Mother seems to think so; but I like nice people, too. Only there's a kind of common, comfortable, really-in-earnest living that I always wanted to know more about."

"Down Gay Street, for instance."

"Oh, yes; how I did use to wish sometimes that we lived in Gay Street! I shall never forget the Carpenters in that second house round the corner. I could look from our windows right over into theirs. There were four of them, sisters; and I never had a sister! They went to some town-school, and they wore dark calico dresses, just

alike, and white aprons bound with colours; and they used to come home laughing and singing, round by the alley, and in at the yard-gate. I've watched them, and listened to them by the hour, playing in that yard, under the horse-chestnut. They made fairy slippers, pink, and purple, and white, pulled from off the balsam-blossoms, and set them by pairs along the brick-edge of the border. I used really to believe the fairies came at night and got them. In the winter, they stayed up stairs, and sat in the broad window-seats and dressed dolls. Oh, how I wished I was a Carpenter girl! They moved away years ago. I've heard father say that Mr Carpenter had grown a rich man in Boston. But I do hope that those girls have as good a time together as they used to then."

"And you never played with them?"

"Well, not lawfully or comfortably. I did get into the alley sometimes, and they pulled me in; father used to laugh so at that excuse; but it was one of the strictly forbidden things."

"I suppose mothers know best, and city is different from country; but I don't think the brown bread would have hurt you."

Say sat still a minute, her two hands on her lap, holding her work forgetfully; presently a smile crept up to her eyes, and she lifted them, smile and all, to Joanna, saying, with a quiet, quaint, little mischief of her own, "There's one little cupboard, though, where I do go and get a bit now and then."

Joanna waited.

"And, rich or poor, Grace Lowder has more in her than any girl I ever knew."

"Who is Grace Lowder?"

"She's a seamstress. I never go without my mother's knowledge, and most often it is about the work. But I carry her things sometimes,—fruit, and flowers, and books; and sit and read to her while she works. Mother doesn't object to that, it is different; it is charity. Grace Lowder is *quite* beneath me; she never need be invited, and meet other people, you know."

Joanna's lip curled a little, involuntarily. "How came you to know so much of her?" she said.

"She comes to St James' Sunday-school. I never noticed her till one day Doctor Linslee brought her to our class. Her teacher was absent, and all her class except herself. We all stared a little, I suppose, as she came in. But I stared because I couldn't help it. Some of the girls looked at her in that hard, strange, astonished way they have, as if it were not quite certain what order of natural history she belonged to. But I thought I had never seen anything more lovely. She had on a soft woollen dress, of that purple gray, just like those grass blooms,"—Say glanced across at an old china vase upon a corner shelf, filled with graceful spears and tassels, among which peculiar, soft, gray-purple, feathery heads, in the perfection of their natural tint, were heaped conspicuously,—“and her shawl was gray, with a narrow stripe of purple in the border; her bonnet, too, with a plain purple ribbon crossed upon it. But her face was so sweet. She is almost always

pale, I know now; her skin is fine and clear as a rose leaf; but she was a little frightened at us all, and she had such a bright lovely colour! and when she lifted her eyes, they were purple gray, too, with long lashes. And her lips looked half sad and half happy, just dropped a little at the corners, and tucked away into dimples that showed with the least tremble. She was just like a picture. But she had a crutch, Auntie; she was lame. And yet she was as graceful as she could be. She drooped down, somehow, into her seat, without any spread or rustle; and the gray dress fell round her like a cloud. Nothing she had on was new; but every thing was as nice as new—without a speck. I think that is the thing; any body can put on new clothes, and be spick-and-span; but everybody can't wear them, and wear them, and look as if they'd never been near any dirt.

“Well—that was the beginning of it. Her teacher was sick, and had to give up her class, and the scholars were divided round. Grace Lowder stayed with us. Miss Westburn went to see her, and found out all about her; and she spoke to some of us about her wishing for more work to do, sewing or dressmaking. Her mother had been a dressmaker, and had taught her the trade; but she had died a year before. Miss Westburn was married the next summer, and she gave her her wedding-dress to make. After that she had plenty of work, and mother has let me go to her. She works at people's houses when they wish it; but I don't wish it; I couldn't bear that, Annt Joanna; Grace Lowder's little room is the pleasantest place I know in Selport!

"She boards and lodges just where she did for years, while her mother lived. A nice comfortable widow woman keeps the house; she was very kind to her mother, Grace says; and Grace has nobody else in the world to go to. I asked her one day what she would do if Mrs Hopeley died, or went away. She may go sometime to live with one of her sons, who, she says, are 'likely men, both of 'em, and very forrard in their means;' but Grace only smiled, and said, there would always be a place for her in the world, as long as God kept her here; she was not afraid."

Aunt Joanna broke in here.

"And this is Selport brown bread! I don't know what the fine wheat must be," said she.

"Tasteless enough, sometimes,—the heart all bolted out of it," said Say.

"But I must tell you about her room," she resumed, after a little pause of stitching that she made between her paragraphs. "It is a corner house, where two streets cross—two narrow streets; and the angles of the blocks are cut off, and the front doors are let in at the corners. It is a queer little square; some person of odd taste must have been the owner of the property, and laid it out and built it up to please himself. There are the four sociable front doors, and four windows over them, facing each other diagonally, and looking each other right through, like the four cats in the riddle. Grace Lowder's room is the second-story one. The two side windows she keeps for her plants. The corner one she sits in, at her sewing.

Opposite this is a corner fire-place, on one side is her bed, and in the other a wide press closet. She has a little round table in the middle of the room with a few books; and the coarse old carpet—with bright, strong colours, though, that make it look cheery—is always swept up clean of every shred, and always has the sun shining on it—that is, unless it don't shine anywhere—for it is a south-west corner. And Grace Lowder lives the happiest, sweetest, most contented life there!”

“Why, Say, it's brown bread to make your mouth water!”

“Down the street, to the west—that narrow street, auntie, between the high, close houses—she has a *view*! She calls it so. The tops of a few green trees in some gardens in Front Street, a little sparkle of the bay, and a stripe of sky. And she watches every night for the sun-sets. One little scrap of a crimson cloud, perhaps, or the stripe of sky turned yellow, and shading up into blue between the chimney-tops. What would she say to look out here over the sea of little hills? Or to get at Cousin Wealthy's dairy window, and see down the mountain-side, out over the great pond?”

“You say she goes out to work at people's houses?” asked Joanna, rather irrelevantly, as it might seem, to the last sentences.

“When they want her, yes; but I think she likes her little room best.”

“Would she come a hundred miles, think, if she could be paid for it?”

“Aunt Joanna! You don't mean”——

"I don't know as I do. But I feel exactly, just at this minute, as if I was going to have a monstrous deal of sewing to do, some time or other. Next summer, perhaps."

As she said this, Gershom Vorse came riding into the side-yard.

CHAPTER V.

UP BOARBACK.

JOANNA went down-stairs. Say did not stir, further than to draw a little nearer to the window, and lean slightly toward the half-closed blind that had shaded them pleasantly from the southward-sweeping sun.

If Gershom wanted her, or if he even got off his horse and came in; but neither of these things did he signify or do: so presently Aunt Joanna came back again, and the horse's hoofs went crunching the dry, savoury chips, and then struck off with sounding thud across the sward.

"Skylark has been out on a flitting," Joanna said, re-entering. She meant Miss Purcell, daughter of the Congress-man at Deepwater—a youngest child, left at home alone now to be spoiled, since her elder sister and the boys were gone. She was a wilful, winsome thing. They called her Skylark, as much for her glad, bright, sun-loving nature, as for her merry, saucy, daring flights. Also, her real name was an uncouth, grandmother's name—Bathsheba. Nobody ever could call her so; it was folly to have demanded it. Skylark grew to be her ordinary appellative, shortened, indeed, to Skylic, the nickname nicked.

"She lit upon Gershom at the Bridge," continued Joanna, without all this pause that we have made, "and chirped him an errand and sent him round. She's to chirp us all up Boar-back next Saturday. We're to meet at the Corners, and go up at two o'clock."

"Oh, glorious! Then you'll go?"

"I—don't know. It's eight years since I tried it, and I'm eight years older and fatter, you see; and I don't know which dress I'd better tear to pieces."

"Poh! make yourself just as lovely as you can, and never mind the dress till you get home again."

"'Make yourself lovely!' Well, you'll see. People come home from Boarback in ribbons."

"That's gay, I'm sure."

"Strings and streamers, I tell you."

"How merry!—

"'Some in rags, and some in jags, and some in velvet gowns!

With a band of music, with a band of music, with a band of music
sounding in the air!'"

Say quoted and sang, and danced her feet upon the floor to time. Her eyes danced, too, with pleasure.

"Yes, I'll go," said Joanna; "only I hope the two she-bears won't come out of the wood and tear the naughty children."

"Because they say, 'Go up,' to their elders? That's the worst we've done; we've no chance at the bald-head part here in Hilbury, where the old ladies all have such magnificent hair."

Joanna smiled. She knew her brown wavy locks were as soft, and bright, and abundant as a dozen years ago

She cherished this and some other little vanities quite quietly and secretly. She was glad her young looks waited. What for? She never answered herself. Many a woman keeps young, she knows not how; because without saying it, she feels her future is not yet dead.

Perhaps Say made the most of her impulse of delight; perhaps she over-acted just a little, feeling an under-pang of annoyance. Yet she was really joyous at the thought. She trembled on the verge of what might come to be a sorrow; but it was not sorrow yet; she knew nothing of her danger. It was vexatious that Gershom should be so chilling—so indifferent; that he should have “pshawed” last night, and refused to come in this morning; but, then, it was his way, and he was very likely in a hurry; and on Saturday they should all go up Boarback together, and, somehow, it would all come right. Say’s was one of those elastic temperaments that, until the last opportunity is over, the last resource exhausted, the last hope crushed, will rebound from every check—spring up from under every disappointment. She was patient, like a sister, with Gershom. Had they not been little children together? Would they not always be something to each other?

For a while this might last; but Sarah Gair was nineteen; she was no longer a child, but a woman, and her hour was coming.

Gabriel Hartshorne left his father with Mary Makepeace and a neighbour gossip, come in, with her clean cap and her knitting-work, to spend a long country afternoon, and drove Joanna and Say in the waggon to the Corners. It was one of his brief holidays.

It was one of Joanna's young days back again.

Joanna had on stout country shoes, laced up high on the instep. Say wore cloth boots, with patent foxings—nice, bright, trim little things, thick enough, but delicate-looking, such as she walked in in Selport.

Gershom helped them down from the waggon when they came up at the cross-roads below the mountain, where the party met. Say knew that he glanced at the foot she put upon the thill; what woman with a pretty one does *not* know when it is seen? And, though he never said a word, she felt a secret shaft from his thought to hers.

“There, he’s disgusted again! At the very beginning! He thinks it’s all show-off and vanity. And it’s the very clumsiest pair I ever had in all my life.”

From the days of the bronze boots until now, the child’s feet had inevitably walked her into trouble with the captious fellow. Don’t hate him. He secretly saw the prettiness, just as we do. He was only provoked with himself when he caught himself admiring what he thought a flimsiness. And he was so sternly bent on not admiring Sarah Gair, because she was her mother’s child, and he would not believe in her.

He is a sailor, he has learned to hold his position in the teeth of the wind; perhaps he may hold it now.

Say walked on without waiting for anybody. Some of the first arrived had gone forward already up the hillocky slope, matted here and there with the close, flat junipers, that rose slowly toward the base of Boarback. The mountain began, away out here, to gather up the earth

into its mass, as the moon draws up the sea in breasted heaps.

They strayed along in little groups, winding in and out, as they found pathway. They might scatter thus, for the approach was broad. By and by they must file singly and toilsomely up the narrow rocky footway where the real climb awaited them.

Skylie Purcell appropriated Gershom. Three or four village girls kept near enough these two to claim a share of attention. Say listened to the laughing and the jesting behind her, keeping her face straight on.

"How in the world did you persuade the captain? We never can coax him into anything."

"I didn't stop to coax. I just told him he was to come. Haven't you country girls learned to take hold of a thistle?"

"Was that it, Captain Vorse?"

"Something so, I suppose. She told me straight out what she wanted. I'm used to short orders, you know."

"And I never get frightened," said Skylic. "I go upon the principle that the most terrible people are the most easily bullied. You see they never think of anybody's trying it, and it takes them right down. Captain Vorse, I want a moose-wood stick presently. You'll cut me one."

"I suppose I shall."

"That's very meek; but it isn't a sailor's answer, I happen to know."

"What is?"

"Ay, ay, ma'am!" The first syllable round and full,

in very pretty man-mimicry, and the last word with an indescribable comic tone of confessed absurdity, but a contradict-me-if-you-dare insistence.

They all laughed merrily. It takes little to make a young group do that.

Say felt herself getting cross. Did he like that? she wondered. She couldn't have spoken to him with such pertness, though she had known him years for Skylië's days. It was the outrightness that pleased him, was it? People might well be outright where they had only little surface knowledge and interest. Say's thought went deep whenever she talked with Gershom, laying hold at the roots of their two lives. And he always seemed to measure so her whole nature by her lightest word. A corollary to be drawn from this, had never yet occurred to either of them.

Gabriel, and Joanna, and Ruth Gibson, came round to Say's side, from beyond the cedar clump that had divided them. Stephen Gibson and John Blighe, escorting the advance, lingered a little as they came to the edge of the woods above, looking round, as they said, for "the rest," their eyes turned, with one accord, toward Sarah Gair.

Into a little glade, where a clear spring hid itself, they all came presently together. The young men filled can-tees to carry up the mountain. The girls sat down on fallen trees and mossy rocks, chatting and resting. Gershom Vorse plunged into a thicket where the moose-wood grew, with its tough-grained stems and broad thick leaves; and cut, with his sailor's knife, stout staves for climbing-poles. Gabriel trimmed and peeled one he had found

already, rounding the end carefully, and gave it, smooth, finished, and delicate white, to Joanna, first of all.

"Cut me one, please," said Say; and she sat watching him, as he shaped it, when Gershom appeared again, with his three.

"This is mine," she said, scarce glancing round, as he held one toward her, after Skylic Purcell had chosen.

"Thank you, Mr Hartshorne," in a little ecstasy; "it is such a beauty."

They moved on again, over braky ground, and among bosks of rampant sweetfern. Say came next after Joanna, and gave her hand with an air of specially-charmed readiness to Gabriel, helping her, in turn, along a huge, dry, slippery log that lay over a springy spot. Gershom saw the little affectation, and set it down sheer, self-pleased vanity, not seeing it quite through. He had no business to condemn. There are hypocrisies of women, which, read aright, are truest truths.

Should Say have gone straight up to Gershom, saying, "You are to come with me; it is you I want to help me?" Skylic Purcell might do this, and it would be simple outrightness. It would not have told the truth for Say; that was better done by the little crookedness. Only one can't read cipher without the key.

"They were to be all together going up Boarback." This was what Say had said to herself the other day; and the opportunity lay large and golden to her thought. Well, here they were; what then? Gershom was close behind her, climbing up the narrow path, as Gabriel Hartshorne was before. He might as well have been

beyond the seas. Skylic Purcell chattered over his shoulder, and Say said never a word. Gabriel held aside the tangled branches for her; and Gershom caught them, in his turn, again, smoothing the way for Skylic.

The ascent grew rougher. It was the old bed of a mountain brook, long ago forced into some different channel from high above, that made their path. There were rocks where water had gone tumbling down, and logs lying athwart the narrow gulley, making long steps and scrambles for them. Up these, sometimes, a strong arm lifted her; it happened so from the necessity—that was all. And so she scarcely thanked him, but kept on, not looking round.

A great barricade of fallen, tangled, moss-grown timber made an end of the brook-path, and stopped them, half way up. This was the customary halt and resting-place. Here the single file was broken, and they seated themselves in groups again. Joanna, a little short of breath, and not slightly flushed in face, yet bright, and even very, very pretty for all that and her old maidenhood, leaned herself willingly back in a wild arm-chair of dead, curving, upturned roots, upon a huge gray log. Say sprang over this, and perched herself higher. John Blighe and the Gibsons found places near her. Skylic Purcell and Gershom, coming last, were still left to each other—Skylic contenting herself with a low, mossy cricket of stone, and the captain, half sitting, half leaning, against the farther, upturned end of the gray trunk, above and against which all the lesser debris were piled.

It was a rough little amphitheatre of rocks, and stems,

and branches. The fresh faces, and graceful figures and dresses of summer colours, filled up its irregular niches with wonderful effect of fitness and contrast.

They passed round shining little tin cups, filled from the canteens, and drank and chatted, growing merry over their innocent tipple.

"Now, Captain Vorse, we want a yarn—a real sailor's yarn!"

Skylie looked up and said this, with her most unrefusable expression.

"Oh, yes!—a yarn! a yarn!" echoed the galleries, up to little Jemmy Gibson, roosting overhead upon an oak limb.

Gershom's brown face flushed red. He never cared to tell stories of his personal adventure; and what else could a sailor's yarn be?

Sarah Gair listened with one ear, waiting his first word of reply; the other she turned to Stephen Gibson, catching his sentences that she cared not a straw for, but which she answered with the mechanical dexterity women—tormented daily all their lives in this wise—have such special aptness for.

"Oh, I'm no yarn-spinner," said the young captain, evasively. "Besides, I'm not old salt enough to have so very much to tell."

"We know better," said Skylie, decidedly. "Tell us something to make us catch our breaths, and think surely it's been all over with you, half a dozen times, even while we're listening and looking you full in the face. That's what sailors come home from sea for!"

"Is it? But you won't understand half I say, if I tell you a real sea story."

"Of course not. I don't know any sea phrases, except 'Heave yoy!' and 'Ay, ay, ma'am!' That's the beauty of it; that makes the story grand, and frightens us so much more."

Gershom Vorse began then, taking them by surprise with his acquiescence, making no more preface. He was not a girl, to hang back, saying neither no nor yes.

"When we were in the *Pearl*, seven years or so ago, bound to Pernambuco, we had a young sailor in the starboard watch—Jack"——

"Oh, oh! we don't care about Jack anybody. We wanted a story about yourself."

"I don't mean to talk about myself. Will you have the story, or not?"

The captain said this quietly, pleasantly, and waited. It was plain to Miss Purcell that he *was* captain, after all. She withdrew her point, with a show of command still, insisting on the previous question.

"Yes, to be sure; we shan't let you off from that. I'm glad he was in the starboard watch, whatever that is. It sounds nice."

She settled her dress about her a little comfortably, and rested her chin in a plump, pretty hand, looking up, with saucy expectation, into Gershom's face.

Quite unmoved, he proceeded.

"It isn't much of a story. Only a bit of danger, over in five minutes, and sooner in the telling. We were nearly off Trinidad—you know where that is?"

"Of course I do. That's geography. And 'off' means—anywhere between Guiana and away over—to Guinea, say?"

"Anywhere less than half-way," said Gershom, smiling. "We were in latitude about 12°, just coming into the Doldrums."

Skylie clapped her hands.

"Haven't the least idea what *that* is," she said, *sotto voce*. "It's growing very imposing."

"It's the latitude of sudden changes—calms and gales."

"Just my latitude," parenthesised the girl, in a whisper, like a child bent on mischief, but afraid of being chidden.

"We'd been lying about for three days—nearly a dead calm—when one afternoon toward sunset, a fresh breeze sprang up from the eastward. Set all sail to catch it, and it came up fresher and fresher, till we were off before it, on the full jump. We made the most of it, while we could, for we knew by the looks of a big black bank to the south east, that we should get more than we wanted before morning. At midnight, the starboard watch went below, and turned in."

"Turned in—what?"

"Themselves—into their berths. I thought you wanted it to be mysterious."

"Oh, yes, so I do; go on."

"Things were creaking and straining then; and we kept half an eye open, expecting a call. Sure enough, in less than an hour, it came. 'All hands—reef tops'ls!' We tumbled up, and found the mates' watch busy enough;

all the light sail taken in, topsail yards braced to the wind, men hauling out upon the reef tackles."

Skylie clapped her hands again, soundlessly, and gave a little restless bounce upon her stone cricket. It was grown delightfully exciting and incomprehensible.

"The wind had shifted to the south-east, and the storm was upon us. The night was black as Egypt. The darkness was like a weight. We groped out upon the yards, holding on for dear life, the wind blowing a hurricane. The best sailor on board had the weather earing on our yard, and it took his best to pass it in time. We had mastheaded our sail first, though, and were down on deck before the larbowlines, breathless and wet through; for the storm was a peeler, and no mistake. The brig was pitching into a tremendous head-sea. The waves came crashing over the forecastle, every now and then, with the *sound* of the shattering white foam we could not see. 'Lay out there, forward, and furl the jib!' Ned Blackmere was the one to go, as he always was when there was tough work to do. Close by him, as the mate gave his order, was a young fellow just down from the foretop; a mother's child, sent to sea by doctor's prescription, for his health; never made for a sailor. It was his second voyage, and he ought to have been up to it, if he ever would; but he had no nerve, and precious little muscle. He was in the larboard watch, and it fairly belonged to him. But he hung back a little; in another second, he'd have been ordered by name,—for our mate never stood any shirking,—only Jack, seeing how it was, and knowing if he was once out over the

bows there'd be a fair chance he'd never come in again, sprung past him, and took the poor devil's place. He thought of *his* mother before he got back between the knightheds again, I promise you.

"The boom was under water half the time. The big sail was jerking and filling, and the two had their hands full to hold themselves on, to say nothing of getting it down upon the boom."

Skylie broke in timidly.

"I *must* just know where the boom is, and how it could possibly get under water. I thought from the danger, it must be something very high up."

Nobody laughed. They were all too much absorbed by this time with the peril.

"It's the spar that runs out beyond the bowsprit,—at the head of the vessel. As the sea broke over, and the vessel pitched, of course it went under. There was only the wet timber to hold on to, with the water dashing over you by the tow, and the canvas slatting out and in, in great bights, as soon as it was loosed; like the side of a house driving against you."

"Oh!" gasped Skylie; and her nonsense all went out of her in a shudder.

"Ned Blackmere shouted like the tempest itself, to the men hauling in, on deck. And he tugged like a great, brave tiger at the work; Jack holding on and helping, as he best might; when, just as they had passed half-a-dozen turns with the gasket, there reared up a black, monstrous wall just ahead, that they felt beforehand, as you feel a

door when you're running against it in the dark, and down it came, with a hundred thunders, over the bows and the whole forward deck. Ned held on, by some miracle, and coming up out of it, gasping, found himself alone on the boom.

"I shouldn't have said 'miracle' so soon; for though it seemed one that even he should have escaped being washed away, it was more than a miracle what happened to the other. He went down off the boom, struggling and grasping out. He felt the sprit-sail yard as the wave dashed him athwart it; and something caught him, or he it, hands and feet, he never knew. But he clung, all blind, and stunned, and smothered, and then—I take it—he thought of his mother.

"Ned Blackmere said afterwards, the time seemed like a month between his turning round and finding him gone, and catching his breath and shouting out, and the fellow's crawling up by the guys and dolphin-striker. But there he was—a little bruised and a good deal blown, and all Ned said was, 'Hallo, shipmate! Took the longest way round! Just make fast that gasket, now, can you, inside the cap!' That's all, Miss Purcell. Those are the sort of things that happen to sailors. Sometimes they come out of 'em, and sometimes they don't."

They were all still an instant, as the story ended. Then Skylic drew a long breath, and exclaimed, half in real emotion, half in drollery,—

"Oh, dear! don't tell any more, for pity's sake! I'd rather not know it. I shall never hear the wind and rain

at night again, without thinking of poor fellows out in the doldrums, under water, holding on by their heels to dolphin-strikers. Let's go on."

Say had meant to be very indifferent, and to go on with the Gibsons ; but, somehow, on clambering down from her perch, she found herself very near Gershom, for a minute, alone.

Skylie had sprung forward, suiting her action to her own word ; the captain had waited, giving his hand to Joanna, who had passed him also and proceeded ; and Say came next.

"Why didn't you tell them it was yourself?" she exclaimed, with sudden impulse, in an undertone, springing down to his side.

"Did you find that out?" said he, quite naïvely, disconcerted. "I hope nobody else did."

"Nobody else among them knows you as well as I do, G—aptain Vorse!"

Now he looked up, in simple surprise. "What do you call me that for?"

"Why, you are, aren't you? And—the other night—I forgot—and I felt quite ashamed."

Say coloured intensely, as he looked at her for a moment, with honest uncomprehending eyes, and then turned away.

He made no answer. He wondered what she wanted now. Was it a mere affectation—a caprice—to see what he would say? Or was it a way of setting him at a distance, of reminding him that she herself was now "Miss Gair?" Had it to do with the old, rankling sugges-

tion of "no blood relation, after all?" He was sore and sensitive; he was ready to suspect her simplest word of profound purpose, because—she was her mother's child.

"I was sure you did not like it," she said, in a low voice, constrained to blunder into speech,—the silence was so terrible.

"I don't know what you mean," said Gershom, bluntly. "I'm only half a captain, at the best. I may never stand on the lee of a quarter-deck again. And here I'm at home, and just what I always was. To those who take me as I am, I'm willing enough to *give* titles, but I don't care about claiming them, Miss Gair!"

"Why *will* you always take me wrong?" she cried out in a tone the more intense, because it was kept under from other hearing. And she dashed on, away from him, into the thickening wood, after the rest. There were tears in her eyes, and she caught herself, blindly, in the tangle of branches, and tore away her veil impatiently, leaving a bit of blue barege behind, upon a stem,—the first of her "strings and streamers."

They began to go to ribbons, now, as Joanna had said. All the remainder of the way lay through the uncleared forest, matted with underbrush, intricate with interlacing branches, and rough with abrupt rocks and ridges, and wild obstructions of natural wreck and decay. John Blighe guided them. There was a way that a hunter could find, though there seemed no path. Out to the left, if they had wandered away from the right direction, they would have lost themselves among frightful chasms and precipices; and beyond, at the right, there was wet ground, and more

impassable jungle. It was no trifling feat, this climbing of Boarback. Ruth Gibson's sun-bonnet had lost half its pretty ruffling from the edge, and it hung back, in a festoon, over her neck behind. Say's veil was presently in tatters, and she put the fragments in her pocket ; and then the ribbon of her hat got a sudden pull, unfastening the bow, and floating it off behind her, like a pennant. Skirts were trodden on, and came out at the gathers ; and there was more than one "barn-door" rent. But all this was nothing, so long as they got to the top, rather it was one half the frolic.

And in another half hour they *were* at the top, upon the highest point of land for fifty miles around ; the bare crest of the mountain rising above the forest they had passed, like the forehead of a giant above his bearded face. Only here and there, like a stray lock about his brow, a pine or a birch flung out its spicy tassels, or its green silky rustle of new leaves.

Away back, to the north, lay untrodden wilds—townships that had nothing but a name—southward, descended lower, undulating ranges—with bright valley-views between—and away off, westwardly, they caught the glimpses of real monarch peaks.

It was a glory to have climbed for ; to have lost gauds and trappings, and to have mutilated gay draperies for.

There were old stumps of huge pines scattered about, felled, or burned away, no one knew when ; and a long fallen log, crashed in among a little group of younger growth. They found rude comfortable resting-places here and there, choosing for themselves different outlooks ; and for a

while there was but little talk. They were tired ; they were also entranced with marvellous beauty, and beguiled with many thoughts that might not readily be spoken.

Fields and farms and houses, where their homes were, looked so little and so lost away down there. The rounds their lives ran in seemed so petty in their measure. The river came down—they could trace it all the way—from the far north-westerly gap through the hills, and had so many like homes dotted upon its borders, and yet such wild broad spaces between. The haunts of the fox and the squirrel looked so much grander than the small circuits men could reclaim and subdue unto their needs. The world was large ; it was an edge here, like the margin of the great sea ; and one could discern more in the mighty off-sweep.

And the wonderful light that came pouring and surging down over all ; on the evil and on the good, on the wilderness and on the town ! How it gathered and rolled in golden mists through the gorges, and lay in purple radiance on the high, far crests, and left deep dark blue glooms of shadow, in contrast, on the eastward slopes and underneath !

Joanna Gayworthy saw more, felt more to-day, than she had done here, eight years ago.

She drew herself apart, a little, from the others, just under the eastern brow of the great crown ; sitting on the crisp, mossy sod, leaning back into a spicy cedar-bush that held her comfortably, with thick, sidewise-spreading arms.

There came a hush over life and soul, a deep rest, a feeling of good and promise in all things—in all living.

She could discern, afar down, the little apex of Peak Hill, and the dot of soft light colour beside its base, that was her home. She knew just where, beyond, out of sight, lay the red buildings of that other farm close by. In that little space lay the whole scene and story of her life. Of hers, and of another, that had blessed and helped and taught her, and had lifted her up to a higher but unspoken faith, by its calm steadfastness and pure fidelity; that had done all this, though it had not fulfilled the dream of a far past youth. There had been the "comfortable friendliness," ay, there had been greatly more. And it had all been borne and lost, gained and gathered, enacted and be- holden there—in that hand's-breadth of the great landscape—that minutest point on God's vast earth, so full of life, of human experience, of grief, and loss, and joy, and growth.

It was as if she were lifted up and separated from it, like a soul for ever risen, measuring her little past against the wide sweep of that eternal present that holds all. And the peace, the infinite hope of it, overspread her and made her strong and glad. The mountain joy swelled within her. She forgot how little distant was young, gay, heed- less presence; she forgot her very self, and the spirit of the old hymn possessed her, and its grand prophetic lines breathed themselves impulsively from her lips, in the clear stirring cadences of long-familiar "Emmons,"—

"O'er mountain tops, the mount of God
In latter days shall rise,
Above the summits of the hills,
And draw the wondering eyes."

With the third line, a broad rich tenor joined.

From the rock above her came the voice, but she did not turn, only kept on, her tones swelling fuller, stronger; growing glorious as with an inspiration; and they sang the whole hymn through, before either singer moved. Then Gabriel Hartshorne came down, and sat upon the moss beside Joanna.

"You struck it first, but it had been working in me," he said. "If you had not burst out, I should. This a gallery to sing it in!"

Joanna did not answer; and, for a minute, Gabriel said nothing more. Old association stirred in both. How could it but be so? You cannot do the merest thing—you cannot turn the corner of a street—you cannot hang your hat upon a peg where you have hung it once—you cannot, if you are a woman, turn a hem, or fit a difficult corner as you sew, or pin a bow of ribbon—but you call up some mood, some circumstance of the past, however faintly, however unrecognised at the instant, that has been coincident, once, with the self-same triviality. Do you wish to reproduce another's bygone mood? There is no surer art whereby to accomplish it, than to reproduce the little outward circumstance, if you can, which witnessed it before; which stamped itself twin with it, in the photograph of memory; that is always busy, that misses nothing, that works ever, with a weird purpose, by a hidden wondrous law.

"Do you know how changed you are in some things, Joanna?"

There was no need to say since when; the same old time was in the thoughts of both.

"Years change most people," she answered, with a difficulty. And then, with an attempt at the old lightness, she added, "I've grown fat and old. I know that!"

"It isn't that. You've grown womanly, but not old. It's no compliment; you know it. But I meant something else. Twelve years ago, you were like Skylic, there."

"Twelve years ago, I was"——"a fool" was on her lips to say, but she suppressed it. It might mean too much, too definitely.

"I remember what my mother used to say of you."

"What was that?" Joanna asked the question quickly, almost sharply. Had his mother disapproved her in her flippancy and restlessness? Had this had aught to do with the ending of that old story, twelve years ago?

"She said you would take such a lot of sobering down."

"I've had it!"

"I suppose we all have had just what was good for us."

He spoke it with a simple reverent faith; a submission that had long ago grown into a large content. It brought back Joanna's mood of a few minutes since, that had been momentarily broken.

"I know you believe that. It is easy to see," she said, with a tone of feeling. "And so do I. Looking out here, made me think"—— Here she paused. Joanna Gayworthy never had told her inmost thoughts. She could not now. Gabriel waited for the space of a minute. No more came.

Then he said, gently, "We are old friends, now, Joanna."

"Yes, old friends," she answered, looking up with a bright, clear, sudden smile, and a content in her face that was like his own. The words expressed the utmost of her hope; the utmost that had been her hope for years. It was very dear to her, this utterance of it by Gabriel; very dear, and pleasant also, his calling her by the old infrequent name.

"Friends tell each other thoughts."

"Yes, some thoughts," said the woman.

"Why not these mountain thoughts?"

"I never can talk 'sanctified.' Mountain thoughts are high thoughts. I don't wonder"—They stopped her again, these thoughts that could not be uttered.

"I don't wonder," said Gabriel, taking up the word, and going on quietly as if it were not a strange, but a certain and natural thing, that their two thoughts should be the same, "that the Lord went up into the mountains, to preach, or to pray, or to be transfigured."

"You've said it. Now, say the rest for me."

"It's all said plain enough before us. Down there"—and he reached his hand out toward the little farm-buildings under the peak—"down there are our lives; what they have been so far; shut in there. Then, there is all the rest of it; room for so much!" The lifted hand swept round, indicating the whole grand circuit of hill and vale under the wide horizon, whereon new glories played in shifting lights and colours with each passing cloud, each hand's-breadth sinking of the westering sun.

A sudden instinct of dread came over Joanna. A terror, all at once, of the breadth of possibility.

"There is *too* much room!" she cried, putting her hands over her eyes, "I don't like to look at it. I have just learned to bear life as it is, in just that little spot. It mustn't move nor change."

"What may change, must. There are things that cannot change."

In the little pause between Joanna's words and Gabriel's answer, his thought had flashed to and fro, lighting up sharp points in the long history of years. His mother, and the change that took her from their round of outward life, yet left the great love that made that life all full of her dear presence, even yet. The young desire—the hope that had been wrenched away, the work that had been given him in its stead, the years of labour and of waiting, and the unchanging force that held him steadfast through it all, true to his vow, true no less to the old fervent passion, though it had calmed into pure, tender friendship that daily he thanked God for—all these were touched by the gleam that kindled at those words of hers, and from the gathered feeling of it all he spoke.

"There are things that cannot change."

If Joanna had looked up into his face, she would have read it in his eyes that rested on her with nothing less than the old glow that had been in them years before when he had tried to tell his love and she had put him off with foolishness. Friendship, was it? A friendship, patient, holy; but a friendship born of fire; such as

can be between two souls only—the souls of man and woman.

She did not look up. She rested still her head upon one hand, her face turned from the fair picture that had moved her so to hope and fear; the other hand she held out.

“Whatever happens, Gabriel, we are old friends, in all?”

She questioned, with an earnestness, an eagerness, as if she dreaded something, she knew not what, and clung to him.

He took her hand and held it in a strong grasp that answered her.

“Old friends. Dear friends, Joanna.”

A loud call interrupted them—a call for help.

CHAPTER VI

OVER EAST SPUR.

DOWN to the northward, the great mountain mass precipitated its descent in steep banks and sheer escarpments toward a wild ravine. They were like terraces ; a bank, —a precipice,—a flat of sward, or a table-rack ; another cliff, another landing ; each successive pitch, a deeper fall ; with shelving ridges that wound and sloped, eastward and westward, merging each ledge with the next, all down the giant shoulders of the hill.

From under the cliff the cry came. No cry of pain, or even fear. Only a call. Joanna's name in Say's voice.

A few rods over, on the westward slope, the greater number of the young party had settled themselves in closely neighbouring groups. Say had been with them ; and Joanna had supposed her with them still. They, perhaps, when she had risen and gone away some fifteen minutes since, had thought her with Joanna.

There had been some merry disputing claim of best places and outlooks.

"It would be just perfect here," cried Skylic, out from a nook of pines, "only that impertinent birch-tree has grown up in the way. There's nothing else between me and Red-cap."

"It's the only thing that breaks the whole western view," said Ruth Gibson; "I've been wishing it away ever since I got here."

"Hasn't anybody got a hatchet in his pocket?" asked Skylic, impatiently.

"I've got a jack-knife," said Gershom Vorse, quietly.

"Just whittle me down that tree, then, please."

The sailor, used to "short orders," went aloft without ado.

In an instant, he was in the top of the swaying birch, a tree of twenty-five feet high, perhaps, with a girth of more than two hands' span.

He began to whittle down.

The feathery crown of upper twigs fell rustling to the ground. Then he lowered himself a little, and struck in a new place. A true branch was severed, and crashed lightly among the others underneath. Dropping a little, hands and feet, he worked away. Two, three, four limbs, each of successive larger bole, succumbed in turn.

It grew exciting. Would he really whittle down the tree? The party watched, and laughed, and cried out in applause.

Say got up, and walked away.

Why should Skylic Purcell order him up and down so? Why should he obey?

Had *they* been brother and sister, with none nearer, in old childish years? Had he scolded and comforted, laughed at and cheered *her*, away back in that time of the dear summer journeys and stays in Hilbury? Had *she* been afraid of his censure, and honoured his honest blunt-

ness, and brought all questions instinctively to the secret test of what Gershom would say—how he would judge? Had *she* waited for these five years for her brother to come back to her, longing for him with a great, lonely, childish longing all the time—having no other love to fill her want, like the love she had missed when her old playfellow suddenly went forth into manhood and the world, leaving her “to be a little girl ever so many years longer?”

What claim had Skylic Purcell like this lifelong claim of hers?

Why should Gershom turn from her, his little Say, scorning her least word of sympathy and pride, and let this strange girl play her freaks with him?

She did not understand her own jealousy, that was growing sharper than a sister's. She only could not bear it, and she turned away.

She walked up the mountain crest, where it heaved itself into that slow, clumsy outline whence it had its name; beyond which, northward, plunged the steeps, one behind another, into the wilderness. She went down a little, over the topmost height, where the first rapid slope trended downward, but had not yet become precipitous. She descended till the mountain summit hid her from sight; till she was all alone; till she paused at the very brink of the perpendicular declivity, where another step would be twenty feet straight down a face of granite.

She sat there on the verge, her feet over the cliff, resting on a projection of the stone below. She looked into

the top of a tall strong birch that grew upon the level underneath, and tossed its crown, quivering and whispering, with every breath, close at her side. All alone, rooted in the rocks; a hard, stern living; reaching up toward the far, soft blue, and trembling ever with its sensitive pulsations against the granite. There was human life like this; she had a dread that she must live it. She sat there, thinking, listening, till the tears stood in her eyes; till the tree-whispers sounded like a syllabled sympathy; till, impelled with a tender pitifulness that was secretly for her own sadness, she reached her hands out caressingly to the green swaying boughs, that came lifting and dropping against her knees.

Suddenly she heard her name from above. She was missed.

The whittling down of the tree had been accomplished. There stood, now, only a bare, jagged pole, making a line against the western sky and the breast of red-cap purpling in shadow, to show where a tree had been, shutting out miles of hill and heaven. There had been a shout of triumph; Say had not heeded; she had only folded more tenderly the young leaves between her palms, and looked through eyes suddenly dimmer with that self-pity, over upon the black surge of the wilderness.

Then they, above, turning one to another, had found that she was gone—gone quite away, and out of sight; and somebody had called her by her name.

It startled her. She was in no mood to go back just yet, or to be found; she had an impulse to spring up, and hide herself away again. Still holding the birch in her

right hand, she placed her left beside her on the rock, to raise herself again upon it.

A strange thing happened. She threw her weight for an instant, inadvertently, upon her right foot, resting, as it did, upon a shelf below. The shelf, a thin shard of stone, held edgewise in a crevice, crumbled from its loose lodgment, and gave way. With the quick instinct of terror she threw up also her other hand, clutching the birch-bole desperately with both. The lithe tree bent with her; she felt, in a flash, how it would be; she had "swung birches" before many a time in sport; she was tossed down fifteen feet and dropped—dropped upon the thick moss and forest mould that bedded the broad platform below. She was safe, but the bough sprang back again and she was left there—there was no way of re-ascending.

She lay where she had fallen, a minute, trembling; she had not gotten over the convulsion of her momentary horror; then she looked around, and the fact of her situation revealed itself. Right and left were craggy shelving rocks; above, the sheer ascent, from whose height she had come down as by a miracle. The only foothold either way was downward still; one might, if one dared, pass out there to the east, upon the narrow ledge, to which this platform dwindled, where the upper cliff crowded out upon it; but whither? She was afraid—astonished; she was perplexed and she was ashamed: astonished and affrighted at this position in which so strangely, in a moment, she had placed herself; ashamed to cry out and make known how she had come there.

Meanwhile the call for her had not been immediately repeated. She heard, faintly, a laugh ; they were at some new jest.

She moved along to the eastward side of the hill, around a huge abutment of the granite, leaving the sounds behind, and coming close under the point where she knew Joanna had been. Then she shouted in a clear, confident, yet appealing tone her name. She had thought for that, if her cry reached them from this strange spot with an accent of distress or alarm, they would be suddenly and terribly frightened for her. She wished to save them this,—above all, she wished, if possible, to avert a general commotion.

Gabriel and Joanna hastened up over the ridge ; they came down cautiously to the verge of the cliff upon that side, and beheld below, sitting on a fragment of rock, half turned away from them, awaiting answer to her call, the “ child,” Sarah Gair.

“ Say ! how on earth did you ever get there ? ” cried Joanna, in dismay.

“ Swung down on a birch, auntie,” she cried back, looking up, half laughing, but her face was pale.

“ What nonsense, child ! On purpose ? Don’t tell me that.”

“ No, my foot slipped and I tumbled into it. How shall I get up again ? ”

“ That’s the thing ! ” said Joanna, turning to Gabriel, with the question in her face.

“ It’s a mile around, by any safe path,” said Gabriel.
“ Where’s the birch ? ”

"Around there by the very top; down behind the old log. But it mightn't bear again," she cried, with a sudden terror, as she saw them turn and walk away upward rapidly toward the crest.

Now, they would all come. Now, they would all shout, and wonder, and ask questions. Now, Skylic would laugh, and Gershom—; well, she would stay here where she was. So she sat down on her stone again.

Up there, above, they found the birch, and the whole party got together before anybody could make a mind up what to do. The breeze had died away; there was no swaying of the boughs, now, toward the cliff; and the strain that had bent the slender bole down, nearly double, had not left it quite erect as it had been before. It swerved a little outward from the rock.

Gabriel moved on a few paces, reconnoitring the crags upon the left; if, haply, any descent there might be possible.

John Blighe looked eager, nervous, measuring the height, scanning the birch with doubtful, impatient eyes. Fifty pounds' difference in weight might make a different jump of it.

"I know the way," he said. "Down under the Rump, over the East Spur, by the old logging road. But that,"—glancing into the crown of the light tree, that trembled just beyond their reach,—“why, it's a thing for a bird to do!”

"Or a girl; or a very brave, quick-witted man," said Skylic Purcell, with a sharp little sarcasm in her tone.

For, as they spoke, the thing was done.

The sailor, Gershom Vorse, used to holding on with his eyelids, lowered himself suddenly down the face of the cliff, grasping its rough edge with his hands ; and, finding a seam to brace one foot in, threw out the other, catching so, and bringing toward him, the yielding stem, whereon he flung himself with all his limbs, and clung as only a sailor could. Down it danced with him through the air, and dropped him safely. John Blighe looked vacant, as if somebody had plucked a purpose from him before he quite knew what it was, that took the breath out with it, and left him gasping.

Gershom looked up and spoke quietly, as if nothing out of the premeditated course had happened.

"We shall come out on East Spur in less than half-an-hour. You can see us if you wait ; and after that it's straight sailing. You need have no concern."

"You'll go down by the logging road, then," said Gabriel.

"Yes ; that is best. It's a bad way round to the south side again, and you'd ought to be gone long before we could meet you. Don't wait longer than just to see us safe out on the spur."

"Where will they come out at last?" asked Joanna of John Blighe.

"Depends on whether he really knows the way," replied that gentleman, in a somewhat sulky tone. "If he has good luck, and they don't break their necks, they'll strike the Deepwater road, somewhere over behind Hoogs's."

"Take Say home with you to Wealthy's," called Joanna to Gershom.

He nodded, and moved on along the foot of the cliff, to find her. He had known just what would be to be done, before a word had been said. He had scaled these ledges, as a boy, years ago ; and the old logging road down East Spur was no less familiar to him than to John Blighe. He knew that Say could never walk round the great mountain, by the winding Deepwater road, to the point whence the party had commenced their climb that afternoon ; it would be quite enough for her, if she could accomplish the long, hard, scrambling descent of East Spur ; and if anybody were to drive round to meet them, there was no certain point within half a mile, at best, at which to expect them ; for the logging road ended abruptly, far away in rough pastures, whence they must choose a track out, as best they could, to a travelled way. A short and smooth cut over a few cleared fields again, after crossing the Deepwater road, would take them to the dairy farm.

"We'll go round there, and say they're coming," said Skylic Purcell to Joanna. "Or, between you, they might be out all night, and nobody the wiser."

"I'm going there myself," said Joanna, quietly. "I'll go with you, if you'll make room, since it's on your way."

"I can take you round," said Gabriel.

"Thank you ; but it will be late, and Rebecca will be getting anxious. I'd rather you'd go home and explain it to her, if you'll be so kind."

Gabriel would be kind. There were no jealousies and misconstructions of young, hasty spirits between these two now. They were old, sure friends. They would do each other best service always whether it were momentary

pleasure or no. Gabriel would go home and tell Rebecca, and Joanna and Say would be kept at the dairy farm till morning.

Gershom knew how it would be. Was there a little thrill of joy for him in it, in spite of his stern will not to be pleased,—to let Say alone, and not to care for her,—Jane Gair's child? He did not ask himself what shade of other impulse mingled with his instinctive sailor gallantry and readiness, where there was a thing to be done that called for cool nerve and trained muscle; what eagerness it was that he felt, as he sprang past John Blighe, and cast himself over the cliff, clinging by his finger-tips. Ah, the honestest of us have the little thoughts in the fine soul-type, that we put by and overlay with a sort we are more willing to look at.

"He should have Say all to himself, this little while, without being able to help it."

Gershom Vorse hardly knew that he thought this; yet some secret, detected content made him suddenly angry with himself as he strode on around the crag, and came upon her, sitting there, turned away, half-ashamed, and waiting. It threw him back into his reserve again.

Say thought it was Gabriel coming. Round there, behind the beetling rock, the sounds of their voices had come to her with a confused perception of direction. She caught some of their words; she heard Gabriel speak and Gershom; she heard them all talk together, scarcely distinguishing who might be above, and who below; and then came the man's step, striding and springing, and she

knew somebody had come to take care of her. When he came close, she turned round. She started up.

"You!"

"Why not?"

"I thought it was Mr Hartshorne." After a little pause, "It was very silly and careless of me. I don't know how I did it. And you are very kind to come for me."

All her little resentment was gone. She was prompt to be grateful, poor child. A small kindness touched her always. Even in what seemed her pleasant life, she had been used to snubs, and ready consideration took her by surprise. To be of consequence, to be attended to, this was what she had not learned to take for granted, even in Hilbury. Her voice trembled even as she thanked him so.

It seemed to him beyond the occasion. There was nothing to make a fuss about.

"You must be got home, somehow, of course." He was hard and matter-of-fact again. She crushed her gratitude back, and got up and wrapped her shawl about her, and was ready to move on.

The wind that had been southerly all the early day, had come round to the eastward in the afternoon; and the air, cool always on these heights, was keen upon the shaded side of the mountain. Say had grown chilly as she had sat there on the cliff behind the crest out of the sunshine; she felt the cold afresh now, coming out of the shelter of the rock and facing the breeze, as she followed

Gershom on along the ledge, where it narrowed rapidly to a perilous pass.

He turned to take her hand and help her round a point of rocks where the foothold was smallest. Beyond, it broadened again to safer space. Here he stopped, and began to pull off the loose rough jacket that he wore above his sailor shirt.

"You are cold," said he. "You'd better put this on."

The words and the act were kind, but the tone was matter-of-fact as ever.

"I can freeze as well as you," she said, shortly; and made as if she would pass him, to go forward. He, on on his part, replied nothing to that, but turned and resumed his leading of the way.

So they went on in their moods, these two strange young creatures, each holding such quick magnetic power over the other, working, as yet it seemed, only for repulsion.

It was not in Say's nature to be haughty, to cast back scorn for scorn; she could flame out for an instant with a woman's proud resentment, but a word would bring her back again to the sweetness of a child. And Gershom was not precisely scornful either; he was only cold and rational, doing things for a reason, by no means for a sentiment. So she thought of him; so he too thought, at present, of himself.

There was a wild delight of daring in the treading of this path they had to follow. To Gershom not so much perhaps; he had been used to the hills and ledges from a

child ; to dizzy spars and slender ropes for years of hazardous life. But Say's cheek tingled, and her eye glowed, as with her shawl tied tightly around her waist, and her dress knotted up behind, away from her feet in a great careless knot, she sprang, like a bird, from perch to perch, along the jagged and interrupted way. The little feet seemed made for dainty poising on the narrow shelves, and she held herself with sure and delicate balance, as if it were but a dance on airy heights, where an instant's uncertainty or giddiness might have been her death. She never thought of being afraid. Gershom could not help, in his heart, a wondering admiration of the bright, brave young thing. He watched carefully for her safety. He reached a ready hand whenever it was needed for an instant. He was cool and heedful ; it was his business to see her safe. But he did it as a business, he said never a word for a long while after that rejected offer of the jacket ; he let no gleam come into his face of admiring surprise as she sped lightly on, never pausing or daunted, following, with clean aplomb wherever he himself could go.

Without him, she might hardly have been nerved to such intrepidity ; it is hard to tell what goes to make a mood ; she felt safe having him, she felt proud, he looking on ; excited to do her best, to be as cool as he, goaded by his indifference to something that was no longer anger, but had a high touch,—was a little superb. Sarah Gair had never asserted herself so completely in his presence ; she had never been so near seizing supremacy.

They came down at last safely to the second landing.

They glanced back, upward to the way they had threaded. It looked almost like bare cliff again. Seen from hence, one could hardly fancy there could be any path. The great mountain pile towered high above them now ; below, a yet more enormous mass stretched itself out, and clothed itself with forest. It was utter solitude. Dense shadow heaped itself like a thing to be felt. Cold, black glooms lay impenetrable about them. The whole great body of the mighty hill was between them and the presence of their friends. No voice could reach them ; no ear could catch a cry. They were here together ; they could only help each other.

There are moments in life when people stand so ; when they look back on the path, broken and perilous, that they have traversed—coldly, perhaps, and in estrangement, yet together ; when they can no longer return ; when they can make no long pause ; when they must help and cheer each other, or nothing human will. In such moments hearts come closer.

At first these seemed far enough.

“ Are you tired ? ”

“ No.”

This was all they said after the peril and the long silence.

They stood still, a little apart ; and the silence of the wilderness, broken only by this pebble of sound, closed up again around them. But the secret influence of the place was working. The solitude was bringing them nearer in spirit.

There came a crash in the woods, just down below

them. Some forest animal, or a broken branch. Say started, and her movement brought her closer to Gershom's side.

"What is it?" she whispered, a little fearfully.

"Nothing," said Gershom, "but a fox, perhaps, or a falling limb."

Say laughed. "I think it is the bears coming to eat up the naughty children. Don't be cross, Gershom!"

She said it with the very old accent of their childish days, when she had used to say it so often.

"I'm not cross, Say. Don't be silly." His old reply spoken very kindly now; for the old days came back, and the secret, present charm had wrought.

"We had better go on."

Say felt the sound quiver as it came to her lips, saying but these simple, common-sensible words, with the thrill that only a returning kindness in Gershie had ever given her.

Both felt it would not do to linger. Say was warm with exercise, and she must not stay here to be chilled. They must wait for no reaction of body or of spirit.

So they went on, and the path narrowed again. Under the overhanging rock they passed around, still working to the eastward and southward, making, through the rock and tangle, for the great outlying shoulder of East Spur.

All at once Gershom paused, appalled. Had he missed his way, that he had felt so sure of? had he taken some delusive turn, and followed a wrong shelving, that would end in middle air, against a hopeless face of rock? or had

there been a break, a fall here since he trod the path before?

They had come suddenly to a bend where they could see but a few feet in advance,—those few feet a mere lintel against a precipice that reached itself up and forward at a pitch that would not let them stand upright.

They might, though at great peril, crawl around. He had come to feel great faith in Say by this time; but what lay beyond? If there should be no way to proceed, might they be able to turn and come back?

It was for him to go and see.

“Stay here, Say,” he said, and there was suddenly something almost tender in his tone.

Was he frightened for her? Had anything gone wrong? She hardly cared at that moment, since he could be gentle once more.

It was only when she saw him stoop to hands and feet, and pass, carefully creeping, beyond her sight, down upon the dizzy shelf around the bend, that the thought smote her of why he did it,—of what might happen to him should the way prove a false leading. She saw it suddenly now, that he had left her here to test a dreadful danger alone.

She crouched down upon the lichened rock whereon she stood, covering her eyes with her hands, an agony of listening in her ears, waiting for a possible sound of horror. She refrained from the call of expostulation that had risen to her lips; she must not shake by a breath his concentration of faculty and purpose; she must wait, and let him alone.

Two—three minutes. How many years did they seem like!

There came a small sound, and then the stillness again,—a sound of a stone falling, rolling, losing itself, she could not tell whether, in distance, or against some resting-place.

The instant's silence after that was ghastly.

She had raised her head; she was gazing at the farthest angle behind which he had disappeared. She scarcely breathed; her vision was almost paralysed by its own intentness; her whole being was gathered to a point, in fear and expectation; then she saw an arm reached into sight—a hand planted, fingers outward, upon the rocky edge; a body lifted, so, sideways, the feet hanging down over the abyss, and set again a little nearer. So he came back over a way where turning had been impossible.

"We must go down lower, Say; half-way to the bottom of the ravine; and cross over so to East Spur." He said it, coming to her side in safety.

Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. She looked up at him with wide distended eyes, speechless. The reaction could not come at once. Her senses held themselves at the climax of their strain.

He stooped down and took her by both hands.

"Say, this won't do! What is the matter?" Then he put his arm about her and lifted her up.

It was well he had been cold and mechanical before. The difference now, the gentle words, the helpful touch, did what the sudden sight of his safety, not making itself believed in instantly, had failed to do. The tension of

nerve and spirit gave way ; she burst into uncontrollable tears.

"There will be nothing more like this, Say ; and you must keep your courage up ; you have been very brave."

"I'm not frightened, it isn't that ;" she gasped out, checking her sobs, and looking up at him again, with a little nervous attempt at smiling. "What did you come to, out there ?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing ?"

"Just that. And when I found there *was* nothing, why, of course, I came back again."

"It was horrible, waiting ! I didn't understand till after you were gone."

"There could be no sham in this. Gershom knew that she had borne a torture of terror for him.

"Can you come on now ?" He kept her hand in his to lead her down. The way was steep, but it was a side-cliff, where they could scramble from rock to rock together. There were no more narrow passes. From his perilous outlook, a moment since, he had seen this, which they could not see from hence, and that the descent was possible.

Say gathered her forces together once more. She would not be a perplexity or a burden. She must go on with him, and she would go on bravely. The elastic joy was over ; but she could be strong, she could persevere. She could do anything, with his hand holding her, no longer perforce, but with a kind solicitude.

There were long spaces for them to drop down, descend

ing this rough, Titanic staircase ; hands and feet were both needed often ; there were leaps, not insignificant, over rifts and chasms ; they had got into the very heart of one of nature's wild and secret places. There was no path. The semblance of one that they might have followed lay below ; they should have descended to it from a point far back ; but it was better to keep on this way now. Half way down into the ravine, as Gershom had said, they found it ; it took them upon a new platform or landing of table rock, that jutted from the overhanging cliff. A little trickle of water came down, through a cranny in the bare face of it, a shorter way, to meet them ; it dropped upon the granite floor, and rolled away over its edge again, a thread of waterfall, that went to help to make up the brook, winding itself in the glen below.

Gershom had his tin cup still in his jacket pocket—a little flat bit of a dipper, that would hold, maybe, two wine-glassfuls. He drew it out, and held it to catch the drops. He gave them to Say to drink. They made her stronger. She looked up when she had swallowed them, and her eye searched the far up impending outline of the crag. Away up, under its very top, was where Gershom had gone, clinging, till he came where there was—nothing ! She could not trace, from here, more than a faint line to show her where the narrow ledge had wound. If they had both ventured ! She said nothing, but there came a shudder over her, and she turned away.

“ We must go on,” said Gershom. “ They will be watching to see us safe out on the Spur ; and the sun is lowering.”

It was only to climb now. Rough work; and the dress had new knots in it before long, where the strings and streamers had grown troublesome, and must be gathered up. The trim, dainty little figure was oddly metamorphosed. But Gershom liked her better so, somehow, perverse fellow, than he had done in the delicate array of purple-pansied muslin, and lace frills, and floating ribband. She was no "thing for a shop-window" now, assuredly.

They stood out on the bare, high shoulder-top of East Spur at last, and all this had been done in about five-and-thirty minutes. Down a little, upon their way over the south slope, the rest of the party had paused, and turned aside, and were waiting upon an opposite height that brought them marvellously near, by an air line, the point these two had reached by such a round of toil and danger. From this to that there was no passing, though. They could hail each other with shawls and scarfs tied upon bough and staff, and waved in signal. That was all. And then, by their two roads, they went their ways down the two separate sides of stern, uncompromising old Boar-back.

There is no act or circumstance but bears its typical relations. We feel, obscurely, many times, a meaning and significance in what we do—a method in our accidents—that startles us with a fear, a joy, an embarrassment;—that carries us, by a strange likeness or suggestion, into a past that we dimly, and perhaps mysteriously, remember, or forereaches into a future moment that might come.

Not a word was said of it,—in the merry party that

turned off together down the south-side track, relieved and satisfied to have seen their companions safe—far less, between the two left so to their own separate pilgrimage. But it was like—and they all had a glimmer of the likeness—the setting forth of two together, in such fashion, striking off and away into a strange and untried life-path, opened for them only. Relinquished to each other, cheered away with friendly signals; but left then to their own shiftings, to make the best of it they might.

Say had a strange shyness come over her for a minute, that she did not try to define; Gershom had as strange a pulse—a single one—of something gladder than he cared to question, as they turned and met each other's faces, after watching the rest away among the shadows, and stood alone again, with wilderness above, below, about them.

"Come!" he said, and stretched out his hand.

And Say came.

There was a joy of claim and confidence, unanalysed, between them in that instant. A key-note struck, responded; a phrase of music uttered, revealing the whole power and harmony life had for them. It should be played out—somewhere; if only there were no discords that might lie between this and its full solvement.

They kept the crest-line of the spur, down to where thick woods began again. It led them straight to the opening of the logging-road, cut through a dense growth of trees, and winding down between tangled branches and underbrush. A mere gully, it seemed now; a path

for a mountain torrent, or a wake left by some old tornado. It was the only way through impenetrable forest.

Disused long ago, and fallen into more than its original roughness, by reason of rains and gradual change of wearing earth and rolling stones, and forest fall and decay, it was no easy path, though a sure one, and devoid of all absolute danger.

It was down hill, without break or rest. Say sprang, as she needs must, from rock to stump, from log to knoll—flying leaps, some of them—on without pause; getting exhilarated again by the exercise and rapid progress, and not realising the fatigue she was actually enduring. Breath failed a little after a time; and she caught herself up against the over-leaning trunk of an oak, and looked back to Gershom, who was close behind, with a panting, comical appeal.

"I don't believe there's any down to it; it's one everlasting tumble."

"Half way down we shall find a rest; and then we shall be sure about our daylight. Are you warm?"

"Exhaling!"

"Thirsty?"

"What's the use?"

He held out his tin cup, sparkling with its little treasure of water.

"Where did you find that? I've seen none."

"I knew of a spring, just back here, off the road, and turned in, luckily, at the right spot."

"I didn't miss you. How strange!"

"It only took a minute. I didn't want to say 'water' until I'd got it."

"No, indeed. I should have choked instantly."

"Drink now, then."

Simple little words these that they exchanged; but they were very sweet, with the old familiar ease and sympathy. Very sweet, also, was the draught Say took from the tiny dipper. It was beautiful to be cared for so, and by Gershom! It was like the old time of the clothes-room and the strawberry feasting. Oh, dear! why must they ever come out of the woods, and go back—she knew they would—to their distance, and their different ways, and their half understandings?

It was very lovely and pleasant, half way down, where a huge rock upheaved and abutted itself, gathering against its sturdy back the soil and sod that made a soft, sylvan throne under wide oak branches; where Gershom lifted Say and placed her, and sat himself down at her side.

They had earned a rest; they had gained time to take it. There was no keen wind here: Say only drew up the folds of her shawl about her throat again, that she had pushed back upon her shoulders in the heat of her down-scramble. And the twilight was about them, soft and sweet; and little trickling music of unseen water, and faint, evening chirp of early birds; and away off to the south-east lay other hills, purple in the level light; while, behind, the great might of Boarback, with all its mysteries and grandeur of cliff and chasm, and piled-up solid heights, and unexplored ravines and pathless woods, lifted and

stretched itself, too vast for them to see until they should get away from it, and it, too, should shape itself in purple distance.

Say could not help feeling very happy. Too quietly happy, too tired, perhaps, to talk much, so she sat and thought. Thoughts came abundantly. How different this day's life had been from ordinary living! How grand and awful the world was, with its high and hidden places, where people might come and look, but by no means abide! The great mountains,—waste land,—acres and acres of bare granite, and untamable wilds, that were nobody's land but God's.

And then—as such do bring themselves to our remembrance—some words of Holy Scripture flashed bright across her thinking. Over and over she was saying them to herself, with a new perception.

“Say! What are you thinking about?”

Say hesitated a second, and then answered.

“‘The strength of the hills.’ I never knew what it was before.”

“Well, what is it now?”

Gershom asked somewhat curiously. He had not caught the precise thread of her musing. She had not quoted all the words.

“The force that is holding all these rocks together, with such a might, and keeps them up in their terrible places, particle by particle, you know.”

“Cohesion, yes; and gravitation.”

“That's what it says in the philosophies. But, Gershom, what *is* cohesion?”

"You said, one of the forces of nature."

"But those are only names. Gershom, is it something living? *Is it God?*—working His work—right here, and everywhere?" Her voice lowered timidly and awfully.

"I don't know." The young man's answer was a little constrained.

Say was out of herself for the moment. She forgot to be ruled; the press of a high thought was upon her, that she would not have uttered without urging, that, being urged, must be uttered in full.

"'The strength of the hills is His also,'" she repeated, slowly. "It reminded me of that. And it seems to mean a living strength. Like ours, that is in us."

Gershom looked round in Say's face. It was turned away from him, and up toward the towering mass that lay beside and behind them, filling the whole north-western sky with its heights of gloom.

She was in earnest, then, and this was a real thought of hers. There was something curious about this child, with her bronze boots, and her "behaviour;" with her grown-up elegance, that he called frippery and sham; her refinements, that seemed to him, often, grapples as he was with realities, the flimsiest of affectations, beneath which nothing real and true could be.

He was not startled or offended at this name of "God," as many a young man in society, going to church regularly of a Sunday, but holding church topics tabooed in polite talk of a week-day, might have been. He had had little church-going, these last eight years; he had seen little of the decorum of a trained Christianity; the Great Name

had been often in his ears, when it was not a reverence, but a blasphemy ; but he had been among men who had their own thoughts, after all, of God, and the great Beyond ; who, when these came uppermost, spoke them without whining or shamefacedness ; rough, unscrupulous, even doubting thoughts, they might be, yet real, unmechanical, avowed as readily as any other thoughts, laid away for no set and proper occasions, and held an indecency at common times. It was not this that made his constraint, it was something that lay only between him and Sarah Gair ; the girl he would not have utter faith in ; whom he would not willingly draw near to with any touch of a deep sympathy. "Trusting and expecting." He would have nothing of that ; least of all, with Jane Gair's child.

Yet he turned and looked at her, and he saw her face lit with a real, earnest thought. It was there, for the moment, at least ; there was no discrediting it.

He had heard her speak Bible words—even utter her understanding of them—before, in the New England home, where they had been so much together, under the sweet, saintly influence of Aunt Rebecca. It would have been strange if he had not. But it had seemed like hearsay ; interpretation put upon her ; Sunday-school drill ; matter of course ; a part of the great system, deep or shallow, as you took it, whereof the text and platform was, as Say had expressed it of old, "People must behave, you know." Abstract theory, to which it was proper to subscribe, but which had little vital connexion with any everyday doing or apprehension ; except, perhaps,—as in the beauty of that home the exception had been forced upon him,—

with grand, kindly-natured old men, and saintly, world-innocent women.

But here was a sudden, spontaneous recognition of "something living." Something living in the dead rock; something living in the old words that sung their mountain psalm to the world three thousand years ago.

Against his will, there was something living touched in the sailor's soul. And against this came up the perplexity, the doubt of a hard life, among hard, suffering lives.

"The strength of the hills is a very pitiless strength." This is what he said to her, after that silent look in answer.

There came a shadow and a questioning over the face that turned now and met his look with its own. She waited for more. She hardly understood.

"If you or I had fallen from the cliff among these rocks, what would their forces have done for us?"

"Crushed us." The words came with a low horror in their tone.

"Pitilessly. I said so."

"I don't know." Say spoke slowly in her turn, using his own words, pausing between the syllables.

"No; we don't know. The world is full of awful strength, and men run against it everywhere, like helpless things, and are crushed. If the rocks are pitiless, the sea seems worse. The rocks wait, but the sea rushes after you, and beats upon you, and fights for your life. Then think of all the waste places, where beasts and savages howl, and tear, and torture each other. And safe people, in quiet little villages, sit together in comfortable meet-

ing-houses, dressed up to please each other, and talk about God! and think they understand something about Him! Handfuls of people in little corners of the great world! And the wars, and the tempests, and the starvings and burnings, and drownings and cursings are going on, all over it, at the self-same time!"

Say had no reply for this for an instant. It was too dreadful in its doubt and its darkness; too overwhelming with its outside force of truth.

"But," she said, presently, "God must be there. He is everywhere. You *believe* it, don't you, Gershom?"

"I suppose I do. I suppose I believe pretty much what other people do. But I can't settle everything by rule and line as they do. I don't *know* much; and I see terrible mysteries in the world."

Say sat, and thought silently. All at once she brightened.

"But these are mysteries of nature, and dangers of men's bodies. There's the soul; and God's soul is behind His strength, as men's are behind theirs."

"You'd better not talk to me, Say, about these things. I don't know altogether what I do think; and I've some thoughts you mightn't be the better of."

"O Gershie!" was on Say's lips to cry. But she had an instinctive knowledge that with the first symptom of personal feeling the talk would be over, and she could not have it end just so.

She was silent, but she did not stir. Gershom waited her movement, and she made none. She sat and looked still at the great mountain, with its hidden, living strength.

"It *must* be all right!" The words escaped her at length, half involuntarily.

"I wonder what you'd said about men's souls if you'd seen the things I have!" This came, an utterance almost as involuntary, out of Gershom's silent thinking.

Say sat still, and answered never a word. Silence draws sometimes more than speech.

"Grinding, and persecution, and treachery, and meanness, and every sin and shame that has a name, or is too bad for one!"

"You must have seen horrible things, Gershom," said Say, in a suppressed tone. "But haven't you seen *good* things sometimes, too? I *know* you have."

Here, again, there was more upon her lips that she dared not speak. His own brave, noble doings were quick in her mind, warm at her heart; but Gershom would "pshaw!" if she breathed of these to him, and that would end everything at once with a cold revulsion.

"They were like light in a great darkness," said Gershom, moodily.

"But, you see, you have not lived at *home*. You have seen the hardest part of life."

"I've seen the largest part. And I've found out something about homes, and your good Christian people, too!" he added, with the old, bitter sneer. "I tell you, it's a fine thing, and an easy thing, of a pleasant Sunday, in a comfortable church, between a good breakfast and dinner, with every nerve at rest, to believe pretty things about God and religion. But what if you were hungry, and had no home? What if your bones were crushed, and you

were lying in some hospital, and nobody cared for you, and they only counted you 'a bed?' I've seen men so,—shipmates. What if your whole life was nothing but one great pain?"

There was a hush again, till Say said, tremulously and humbly, speaking beyond herself and her little experience, surely that which was given her, for herself, and for that other soul also,—

"I don't know; unless I found that God was in the pain, too!"

"But suppose" — Gershom went on remorselessly now, swayed by his own bitter impulse of doubt born of the hard things he had seen and suffered — "suppose you'd been deceived, till you couldn't trust them that ought to be your best friends; suppose that you had never known more than three people that you could believe in, and suppose you'd known them cheated and ill-used till it was harder to think of for them, than for yourself; supposing you had seen all the rest of the world outwitting and hustling and chuckling over each other, like the devil's own children, till you were ready to hate the very sun for shining on such things;—where would you find God and goodness in all that?"

Say stood up suddenly before him. Instead of a direct answer, she gave, for all his questions, a single searching one that rang clear over the confusion that was in him.

"Gershom Vorse! do you think you are the *only* soul God has made capable of hating such things as these?"

Out of his very scorn he was answered.

He stood upon his feet too, then. He looked again in the glowing young face, that was almost angry in its bending upon him. It was better than if she had told him of his goodness, his bravery; she had charged him boldly with a haughty assumption in this noble hate of his; she had given him a weapon for his innate truth to grasp, against his own dark uncertainties. Something lighted and softened in his eyes as he looked upon her.

"That was a good word," he said, honestly, with a changed tone. "A good word for a last one. We'll let that be the end of it."

The rest of the walk was nothing. The getting home to Cousin Wealthy's—the nice supper—the answering their eager questions—the being comfortably helped to bed by Aunt Joanna; all these were well enough—at any other time; but she went through them all mechanically. At most they were but interruptions.

"She is tired out," they said.

She lay down to her rest with crowding thoughts,—with some misgivings,—but a great peace shining through them all.

She had said a "good word" to Gershom. It had pleased him, for that it was true and bold. She had met him on his own ground. They had come near each other again at last; she wondered at her own new strength, she had always been so timid—so easily put down.

Would things be different after this? She wondered how it would be in the morning?

CHAPTER VII.

SUNDAY.

IN the morning Landy came over early with inquiries and a parcel—Say's dress for the Sunday and other needfuls. When the sweet breath of the woods, and the wild singing coming in upon her through the window Joanna had softly set open, roused Say to a full wakefulness, she saw, delicately laid out on one chair, the pansy-muslin carefully pressed over, and the puffings perked out, in all the dainty freshness of its first day; on another, in the opposite window, the blue foulard, looped and knotted, and draggled, and rent, looking like a banner brought home from battle. Beside it, on the floor, lay the little black boots, so trim and neat yesterday at starting, bursted and torn, trodden into such shape as no boot of hers had ever come to before; making her think of the twelve princesses in the fairy tale who mysteriously danced their shoes out every night. It was like a night-vision to her almost, the recollection of that mountain dance of yesterday,—like a dream, the strange earnest talk with Gershom; but a blessed present joy—something that she grasped to her soul—the tone that rang back to her recollection as she had it from his lips at the last, his harshness and bitterness suddenly swept away.

"That's a good word, for the last. We'll let it be the end."

It was so honest and noble of him, too, taking the good out of it, when she had felt it hard and sharp in the saying, launched with almost a passionate indignation.

She was half sorry to break the spell ; to come down in her proper and nice array again, she would almost rather have put on the old bedraggled, forlorn foulard, if so she could have kept the spirit of some of those moments of which it was like a sacred relic. She rolled it tenderly up with all its rags and stains, putting the demolished boots within it, resolving to herself secretly that it should never go the way of other rags and wrecks, but that she would put it carefully where she might keep it safely always.

For Gershom had seemed like a brother again, and she had said one word to him that he had confessed was good.

Very sisterly this was, all of it. Say thought so ; she had never had a real brother, so how should she be supposed to know ?

She could not help her habit of niceness ; she could not turn away from that image in the little mirror until every wavy line lay smooth upon the bright head, and rolled itself gracefully away into the braids behind, any more than an artist could turn from his work, leaving a heedless or mistaken touch. It was habit—instinct sense of the pure and perfect ; these more than vanity. She could not have done violence to her nature,—she could not deliberately make herself dowdy, even though Gershom should have liked her better so. Which, knowing something of men

and their contradictions, we may feel tolerably safe in doubting after all.

She had slept late. When she entered the room below, she found only Joanna sitting there, and the table cleared, except of one pink-and-white china plate, and a quaint little coffee-mug and saucer to match.

Cousin Wealthy brought in two fresh wheaten rolls, baked since Say's footstep had first sounded above; two new-laid eggs, boiled since her door had opened; a little pitcher of golden-brown coffee, steaming oriental perfume; a tiny, shallow, silver sauceboat, filled with yellow cream; and a pot of June butter, with a daisy stamped on it.

There came a double tread of men's feet over the platform outside as Say sat down.

"We had company come last night," said Cousin Wealthy; and Gershom entered, followed by a tall, strong, grizzled, sea-browned man, with sailor gait, whose dark searching eyes, that had looked on strange lands and people everywhere all over the earth, glanced round him here as if this port of home of all others were strangest.

"This is Mr Blackmere," said Gershom, in an off-hand way, that sounded like—"Now I've mentioned it, you've nothing more to do with it."

But Say had heard of Ned Blackmere; she rose from her chair, and walked to meet him, putting out her hand. Looking straight up, also, with a certain warm reverence in her eyes into his hard rough face.

I think Ned Blackmere had not touched a woman's hand before, for twenty years, perhaps. How do you think he felt then, as the soft pure little fingers lay for a

moment in his, that had known nothing softer than tarred ropes and marlin-spikes; and the eyes that had never learned to keep the soul back out of them, looked up so into his own?

Say saw something in his face that few had met there before; she thought he looked gentle and kind. She saw something that did not seem quite strange to her; it was as if the look had somehow come into her life before. Then she remembered the old days of the *Pearl*, and the cracking of cocoa-nuts. There was where it had been, of course, yet the familiar gleam came with its sudden grace of tenderness that did not join itself to her memories of the rough sailors. Presently it was gone, and when she looked again she could not remember that she had ever seen his face at all.

Gershom had been at home ten days. He had received a letter from the owners in New York, whose ship he had saved and brought home, offering him the command again when she should have been put in repair. He simply declined it with thanks. To his mother he gave reasons—they were her due; for her sake it was his business to rise if he could.

"They expect work of their captains that I couldn't do, mother. Work that isn't in the written orders, and couldn't be in lawfulness and honesty. When I'm a merchant-captain, I mean to *be* one; and no smuggler, out or in."

"And now," he said, "I want you to do something for me. Write a letter to Blackmere—a motherly letter, mother,—and get him up here into the hills. I can't do

it; I've tried. He says he's no fit company for anything but his ship and his pipe; and yet the man has got a soul like a king!"

Prudence wrote such a letter as the "real mothers" only write. The kingly soul recognised its genuineness through the wrong and prejudice of years. Ned Blackmere came, riding up into the Hilbury hills that same Saturday twilight wherein Gershom and Say were having their talk under the shadow of Boarback.

The sailor asked Wealthy for a match; and then he and Gershom went out again upon the platform, and Blackmere smoked his pipe.

By and by, the sweet country chimes began. Through the still air they answered each other up and down the valley, and sent their tender echoes from the hills. There were new churches in the factory village at the Bridge; but all the beautiful and holy memories clustered still around the ancient meeting-house at the centre. No old Hilbury people thought of going to any other. Its mellow bell rang dearer, solemnner tones than all the rest.

The "colt"—Wealthy never had any but a colt; the old one was dead and gone long ago, and she had driven his successor now for eight years—stood harnessed to the waggon. Say and Joanna came down in their Sunday bonnets,—Joanna's ribbons and laces smelling of the quaint faint breath of musk that our grandmothers loved.

"Will you go to meeting, Gershom?" Joanna asked him, as she stood in the doorway.

"I guess not," he answered, with a shadow of gruff-

ness, "it's as good out here in the woods; and the dress-up takes down the devotion, rather, for me."

"Folks will expect to see you; you didn't go last Sunday."

"*Folks!* I should suppose it was the Lord; and I don't want to be seen of men or women."

Joanna hadn't her gentle human theory—her "God-sibb"—ready at the moment for answer; she let it pass; it was Gershom's way.

Say passed by him and spoke to Blackmere, out beyond.

"Won't you go to church with us, Mr Blackmere," she said, with the same sweet uplook at him she had given him before. It was to the unused sailor very much as if a flower had lifted up its head and spoken.

"Yes, I'll go." He hardly knew whether he had answered of his own will; but the words came and he stood pledged.

Gershom lifted his eyelids a little, and said nothing.

So they drove off; so Ned Blackmere—the rough old salt, used to the weather-earing in a gale, used to everything that was hard, and perilous, and coarse, with only a dream in the far back past of a child's home and a mother; of a sister who had turned his love into bitterness; of a wife who had made him hate and forswear all women for her vile disloyal sake—found himself among women again once more; found himself presently in the quiet house whence prayers go up to God.

He sat there in a sort of maze, as in a vision one

might seem to see a world into which one had never been born.

He wondered if this were the real thing, and the great world outside, that tossed, and struggled, and endured, were a huge mistake. For twenty years he had never stumbled into a scene like this, and here were people to whom it was the soul of their whole lives. Why had God given this, and that? If He were, and if this were His ordained way of finding Him, why was it only possible in safe nooks, while the wild world was roaring without, and the danger of it to be dared by souls made hard and reckless to meet it, and the labour of it to be done by hands that had no time to lift themselves in prayer.

The sermon did not help him. After a little, he tried not to listen to it. Once he caught himself in the beginning of a breath that would have been a whistle instantly. It was so hard for him, with his vague, bewildered thoughts, and his habits of unconstraint, to remember the traditional sanctities of the place.

His dark features gathered themselves more than once into a heavy frown, as sentences of the preacher broke upon his musing, and forced a hearing. Only when his eyes fell upon Say they sometimes softened. She watched him when he was not looking, and tried to imagine what the secret consciousness behind that stern face might be like.

In the morning, Say joined herself to Blackmere again, and asked him to come into the churchyard. She would

show him old gravestones and curious inscriptions. She felt responsible for him, since she had brought him here, that he should not feel strange or dull.

They stood by graves inviolate for upwards of a century.

"They rest quiet enough—all of 'em," said the sailor. "Don't they?"

"In the hope of a blessed resurrection," read Say, from a gravestone, in answer.

"'Asleep in Jesus,'" repeated Blackmere, standing before another. "Well, they seem sure enough about that, somehow. Seems to me, when there's so few to be privileged, it won't do to be too certain. How about them that never knew whether Jesus cared a hang for 'em or not?"

A shadow of contraction passed over Say's face at the reckless expression.

"I beg your pardon. I'm a rough fellow. I'd no business to come here at all."

"They have all been taught. We all know that He came to save us." Say answered his first words, now, as if they had been spoken in all reverence.

"Do we?" There was a curl of the lip, and a slight sarcasm in the tone.

The young girl looked pained.

"See here!" said Blackmere again; "you're not the sort of person for me to speak out to, so; and yet, somehow, I can't help it. I don't know why; but you've got me here, and now you make me talk. So if it isn't just the sort of talk, or the ways of thinking, that you've been used to, you must think what *I've* been used to, and overlook

it. I've never had much good of preachers ; and, till this blessed morning, I haven't set foot in a church for over twenty years. And what do they tell me when I do come ? You heard it. That man stood up, and explained the Almighty's secret plans. He don't *mean* to save everybody. Now, I'm only a poor devil of a sailor, and, of course, I don't know ; but if *I* came with a life-boat to a wreck, I'd make no such half job of it. I'd save every soul on board, or I'd go down trying."

Say's heart swelled. She could find nothing to say. She felt the fearfulness of this Heaven-arraigning ; but she felt also the nobleness that Heaven itself had given.

"He's laid it all out, beforehand, and for ever. He's elected some to salvation, and some to damnation. I beg your pardon again ; but that's the preacher's word ; and the Bible word, too, it seems. And it's the word my life corresponds to. 'Tis easy to tell which watch I'm in."

"It's difficult to understand what they mean exactly by these doctrines," said Say, timidly. "I've never heard them much except in Hilbury. I think it was the hard, old way of taking Bible words. I couldn't help thinking some thoughts of my own, this morning, while Mr Scarsley was preaching."

Blackmere went on again, when she paused ; as following out his own reflections, almost unheeding her words.

"The damnation began when I was nothing better than a baby," he said, bitterly. "The curse came among us then, and it's gone on ever since ; been piled down upon me heavier and heavier. Did you ever hear about my life, young lady ?"

"I have heard of a great deal that you have suffered. I have heard of very noble things that you have done."

"I've been in prison, for a crime. I've got a halter round my neck this minute, or the brand of it. Did you know that?"

His tone grew sharp and fierce.

"I knew you were accused; and I knew you were proved innocent."

"No; not proved. They only couldn't make it out against me. Some of 'em believe it to this day."

"I don't think that. But it has been a hard thing. A hard thing given you to bear," she said, slowly, with a hidden meaning of consolation.

"A piece of the damnation. A thing to keep me down, and thrust me out. To make a vagabond of me, and clinch the sentence."

Say trembled, standing there, at the man's passion.

She had never had to teach. It was hard for her trying to guide, even ever so slightly, the current of a human thought upon these themes of life and death. There was the shrinking every young soul feels at unveiling its secret faith. She was far from taking it upon herself deliberately to admonish; to set this doubting and discouraged spirit right with God. She knew, oh! very little. She had seldom asked herself, even, what she truly did know or believe. Life had not put its sternest questions to her yet. But the thought of this man—hard, despairing, defiant, with the recklessness of one to whom the truth, whatever it might be to others, seemed only a relentless curse—this thought, this utterance, drew from her, irre-

sistibly, her own ; thus, in her first close scrutinising of it, in its first waking to a conscious strength, demanded of her instantly.

"I can't make it agree with what Jesus said himself," she said, with modest reverence. "'Not a sparrow falleth to the ground, without your Father.' 'Ye are of more value than many sparrows.' 'The very hairs of your head are all numbered.'"

"It don't agree ; but they're both alike in the Bible," returned the sailor, bluntly.

"'Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God,'"
Say repeated, thoughtfully. It had been the morning's text. "It made me think—just his reading it, and the few first sentences he said before he came to the puzzling part—how comforting it was. That everybody should be 'elected' to their own particular life, and death, and all. Not forgotten, or let stumble into it by accident ; but chosen. And I suppose the noblest souls—the dearest souls to God—might be chosen for the hardest. The best men in the ship are chosen for the hardest, aren't they, Mr Blackmere?"

The sailor looked full at her, with a strange light creeping suddenly over his face—the light of a new, gracious thought, gleaming up across confused clouds of doubt. There was doubt there still, and hardness ; but they were shone upon unawares.

"And the trust—the honour of it—makes it easy ; don't it?"

Blackmere looked at her for two or three seconds before replying.

"If I could think a thing like that!" he exclaimed, at last. "I can stand taking the toughest, when somebody must take it; I'd never shirk a weather-earing; that's what I'm cut out for; but a fellow's spirit's broke by hazing!"

"He doesn't haze!" The young girl spoke it with an awe, a tenderness, an assurance. Blackmere stood gazing at her still, his own look melting.

"How the Bible verses come up and explain each other, when one begins to think," said Say. "'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.'"

The words fell slow and musical from her lips. The soul of the hard, life-buffed man caught them to itself like pearls.

They had wandered to the oldest, most secluded part of the cemetery. Down the sunshiny slope above them came now Aunt Rebecca, looking for Say. The girl moved up to join her. Blackmere turned away abruptly, passing down where the far shaded extremity of the burial-place joined itself to the natural forest.

"I have had such a strange talk with Mr Blackmere," said Say; and she tried to tell it over as they walked up toward the vestry door, at the back of the old meeting-house.

"Elected!" repeated Blackmere to himself, as he plunged along the rustling woodpath, unheeding whither. "That's a new way to take it; and a different one from yonder howling doctrine. I wonder if the girl's notion is right. If I thought the tough job had been set me by Him

above, there, and He cared how I came out, I'd face it in a way that wouldn't shame the stuff He's made me of. I could put a heart into it. But it never looked that way to me afore; and how should *she* know? And yet, when the child riz up to meet me so, this morning, holding out her hand for mine, it seemed, somehow, I don't know why, as if she'd come with a gift in it!"

CHAPTER VIII

LIFE'S WORD.

PRUE had not been at church. Wealthy went home when the morning service was ended. With her unwontedly large household this was necessary. There was a plentiful tea-dinner to be got ready; and Joanna and Rebecca would come round with Say, after meeting, to "pick up her things," and take her home. So, at least, the good woman had requested, and expected. But matters turned out differently.

The fatigue of the day before, the exertion she had already made to-day, the excitement of her talk with Blackmere, began to assert themselves with Say. Coming up again, in the face of the hot summer sun, the church-yard slope, her head began to throb, and remind her, with fast-growing pain, that she had done too much. When she reached the vestry, just vacated by the Sunday-school children, out, now, for their short nooning, she seated herself, languidly, upon a bench, and her face suddenly lost its light, and her eyes contracted themselves.

"I believe I'm tired out," she said, with a little smile. "I've just discovered it; but I really am. I wish I could get home—to Cousin Wealthy's I mean."

The child remembered her treasure of rag and wreck, and would rather secure it with her own hands, silently.

"I should be nicely rested by the time you came. Could Landy drive me before meeting?"

To be sure Landy could; the first stroke of the bell recalling the worshippers came after them on the air, as, round by the Deepwater Road, Say and her escort reached the bar-place into the back pasture under Hoogs's Hill.

"You needn't come any farther," said Say, laying her hands on the reins. "I'd rather get out here, and walk up."

She wanted to go quietly into the house, and reach her room, if possible, unobserved, to get an hour's rest before they should know she had come back. So she checked the horse peremptorily, and sprung out lightly over the thill. Landy, a slow fellow, had only time to get as far as, "he'd jest as lieves"—when Say was through the bar-place, and he found himself alone in the road.

"She's a whisker, I vum," he ejaculated; and turned his horse's head Zionward again.

The path through the back pasture wound up along the side hill, and came round under the dairy windows, at the rear of the house; and so, still farther, around its end to the square platform in the front angle. Against the building, at this projecting end, Jaazaniah had built, long ago, a rude bench, sitting upon which, one could get the southerly breeze that came up among the pines, and also the fair, wild, southerly view, through openings down the hillside, to the gleam of the pond. Just over this rough seat was the window by which he had lain in his

long illness, taking in, for all joy and comfort, the sunshine and watershine, the shadow and fragrance and song whereto it gave blessed aspect and entrance.

Say got thus far, and paused, because she was tired, and the head beat with a new aching, and it was soothing here in the shade ; because, also, she heard voices in the angle, and waited, if by any chance she might yet pass in unseen.

They were the voices of Cousin Wealthy and Gershom Vorse ; and these words came first, distinctly to her ear.

"It's all a queer mixing up of things to me. That girl talked yesterday, upon the mountain, about God, with a look in her face as if she felt Him ; and to-day, she had on her little dainty airs and smiles again, and must go to meeting in starched muslin. It's a curious world."

"The world's well enough, Gershom Vorse. And what's more, if it wasn't, you're in it, and part and parcel of it, queerness and all. You can't stand off, and look down upon it, and judge it. There's only One can do that. And He don't. He came down amongst us. You're hard upon the world, Gershom ; and you're hard upon that child. She mayn't be clear wisdom and perfection ; but she's a bright, loving, little thing ; and she sets by you as she does by her life. Only think, she never had an own brother, nor even a sister."

The woman instinct and *esprit-du-corps* it was, that put in that ; and the child, listening, blessed her for it ; blessed her, while her cheeks flamed and her brow throbbed more wildly, and a strange shimmer of light seemed to show

her suddenly a place in her own heart that she had never looked into before.

"You must take love as you can get it—ore or nuggets—and be thankful, or go without. The Lord never sends it for nothing; and however it comes, it's a piece of His own. Sarah Gair has grown up with you in her very heart; and it's a cruel way you take with her, slighting and fault-finding, and watching, and carping. I've ached to tell you so, and now I've done it."

"I like Say, I always did; but she's had a poor bringing up."

"That ain't her fault; and I can't see as it's done her so very much harm. I'm an old woman, Gershom, and I know what things are worth. I'll tell you something about myself. I didn't always take things right end foremost. I had a way, once, of twisting 'em about, and looking 'em over, to find specks in 'em. I kept Jaazaniah off and on as long as his mother lived. It didn't seem to me always he was right up to the mark in everything, as I wished he was. Well, when she died, of course I couldn't go on staying here alone with him; so I packed up and went off, and lived along of Mrs Gibson for more'n a year. And all that time, he was after me, and I was considering. I couldn't give him quite up; there wasn't as much more love left for me in the whole world, as there was in that great, clumsy, honest heart of his. Sometimes I'd as good as made up my mind; and then he'd go and say or do something that would just upset the whole calabash, and I'd have to begin all over again persuading myself. But I never stopped spinning and weaving my piles of house-

linen, for all that ; if I'd only known myself what I meant by it. The thing that made me cross was, that he never took up spirit to answer me back in my own way, but just gave in to all my tempers and impudence, when, half the time, the things I said were just to put the very words in his mouth that he ought to have said back, and if he had, would have made me feel a sight better. One day he'd been a-pleading, and I'd been a-hectoring, and, finally, I just burst out at him. 'Jaazaniah Hoogs,' says I, 'you haven't got the character of a fly ! I do wish there was more *to you* !' Of all the looks I ever see in a human face, his was the grievedest then, and the most humble ; and yet, in a kind of a way, it was the grandest. There wasn't a particle of blame or anger in it ; but a great, sorrowful, patient enduring. 'Wealthy,' says he, and his words didn't sound mean nor snuffling, but real manly and gentle, 'I know there ain't much to me. I wish there was a great deal more, for your sake ; but you've got all there is !' I took him, then, for he belonged to me. And I've known, ever since, that we belonged together. We belong together yet !"

Wealthy's voice shook a little, but her words were clear as her faith was strong.

Gershom Vorse was silent. A minute after, Cousin Wealthy walked away into the house to lay by her Sunday things, and find Prue. Gershom lingered a little, and then his firm, quarter-deck tread was heard across the platform and down the rocky path toward the great barn.

Sarah Gair was left alone.

She sat there in a helpless pain—a pain of body, and

an ache and shame and confusion of soul. She knew, by that shame and confusion, that the love she had called sisterly, when she had looked at it to call it anything, was more, and different. She had "grown up with him in her very heart." No love, now, could ever come closer. Her pride, her joy, her glory, her claim in him,—she had never felt these—she knew she never should feel them—for any other. He had held the place in her thoughts, her dreams, that but one can truly fill, and once, for any woman, whatever semblance may come after. His approval was gladness—his blame was suffering.

And he "liked her—had always liked her;" that was all.

And Cousin Wealthy had stood and pleaded for her! Oh, it was bitter shame—pain unendurable!

Notwithstanding those saving words—that hint at brotherhood—what, to his quick apprehension, his merciless insight, could it all mean—that story of Wealthy's own love that had been the one love of her life, and its comparison with hers,—what else but this, that every drop in her veins tingled to think of?

She was self-convicted. She could never shut her eyes to it again. She knew now what she had meant to do in cherishing those shreds up-stairs that she had rolled together and hidden away in the deep closet corner, lest any one should meddle. They might lie there now; she would never touch them.

"He had liked her; but she had been ill brought up." He did not approve; he pitied; he was tolerant of her.

She had not suffered all that was set for her to bear this day.

While these sensations, that were hardly thoughts, yet rent her in her helplessness, a sound of spoken words reached her once again.

She was directly under Wealthy's bedroom window. Against it, inside, stood the bed. Wealthy approached to lay her bonnet and shawl there. Say knew her habits, and understood the sound of every movement. At the same time she began talking to Prue.

"I've been saying something to that boy of yours that's done me good. He's a noble-hearted fellow; but there's other hearts in the world as well as his; and he's hard; and I've told him so."

"He's true," answered the mother. "Truth may be hard sometimes; but he can't help that."

"Yes, he can," persisted Wealthy; "or, if he can't, I don't know but I'd as lieves he'd lie a little now and then! He's cruel to that child in his thoughts and in his ways."

Say's hands flew up to stop her ears from further listening. She could not get up and go into the house. She could not stay there now. She must steal away presently when they were out of hearing, and go home; and they must never know that she had been there. She lifted her hands to the two sides of her head; but she had no power to fasten them there. Words came that compelled her to hear on. One may refrain from deliberate hearkening to what is not meant for one's knowledge; but there is a momentary incapacity to resist what comes to one

insought, seizing one's very life, and piercing it, as this did Say's.

"I suppose I ought to be half an hour pretending to try and find out what you mean, Wealthy Hoogs," said Prudence Vorse, in her strong tones. "But that isn't my way. I see it plain enough—as plain as you do. And to that there's just one answer, in his mind, and mine too—she's Jane Gair's child."

"She's a Gayworthy."

"The best blood may be spoilt by a bad cross. She's a Symonds, Hannah Symonds' grandchild; and the mother's clear Symonds, without the first redeeming particle!"

"I don't think much of Jane myself; but you're very hard, Prue."

"I might be harder, if I called that woman to a strict account."

"Doubtful undertaking. She's a manager."

"Yes," returned Prue, with a peculiar deliberation and quietness. "She's a manager. She's managed my boy out of his home, and away from me. By a lie, and a hiding, she's managed him into a rough, dangerous, distasteful life. She managed her good father into his grave. And, what with prying, and poking, and concealing, it's my belief she's managed more. It wouldn't want much ferreting, maybe, to find the rights of it. But I shan't take up the job. I'll leave her sin to find her out."

"You never speak without a reason, Prue. And yet you never spoke of this before."

"I haven't been touched so near the quick before. It

isn't a thing that'll ever be made plain in this world, most likely ; but if that woman had a clear honest mind when her father lay a-dying, and that day afterward, when we all sat together while Reuben Gair looked over the papers that nobody ever touched rightly before but the doctor, and read that will—why, then an angel of heaven might wear Satan's own colours, that's all !”

“ These are hard things, Prue—hard things, Prue,” Wealthy repeated ; “ and it was a hard time to judge her.”

“ She went round with a hard face, Wealthy, all those days. There was nothing soft or grieving ; anxious enough—too anxious-looking ; in a strange, absent kind of a way, a sort of still flurry, as if she'd something on her mind. Her father had a talk with her ; and what it was, lies between her and the dead. *I know she kept back something.* And before Reuben laid his finger on the will that night, she started, and her look changed. *She knew that he was coming to it ; and she knew she had no business with her knowledge.* She's false, and sly ; but she isn't deep. I read her face, and it was the face of one who should never be a mother to my boy !”

Say put her hands to her ears now in an agony. She had been spell-bound to this point ; but she could hear no more. The impulse that would have been a shriek, if it had dared, brought her to her feet, with her hands held tightly so against her head ; and she flew, with steps noiseless, though headlong, down the hillside path that opened before her, between the pine-trees, toward the pond.

To get away from this house of her friends where she had been wounded,—to escape all sight of them,—to reach somehow, in this bewildering pain that held her more and more fiercely, a place where she could rest and be alone ; this impelled her desperately.

She followed the path around the margin of the pond, through the perfumed summer woods, along by the still plashing water that throbbed up upon the pebbles, the nameless fragrance drifting over or with it, that comes upon the freshened air wherever sweet water flows, with the blue cloud-flecked sky bending down and repeating itself as of old ; all this was as it had been in her childhood, when in these things lay sufficient joy ; and the stricken woman passed them by.

“Elected ! elected !” The word kept ringing itself over to her inward ear. Now, she was beginning to know whereto. To this, and to no other thing. Her pain was upon her ; her own separate allotment, this was like no other soul’s on earth.

Where was Gershom Vorse.

“I like Say ; I have always liked her.” This was the most he had had to say to Wealthy’s urgent, unsparing remonstrance. He said it quietly, almost coldly ; then he listened without a word to all the rest she had to say ; took in silently the simple pathos of her story of the one love God had sent into her life ; and when she left him, turned and went his way.

To suffer, too—in his strong, terrible, restrained man’s way. For he knew now likewise what that “liking” was ; something grown up with him into his forceful nature, as

Say's thought of him in her "very heart." What God hath joined together, man may not put asunder.

Man will try, though. Man will let his pride, and prejudice, and hate stand between him and his love, making a fight of it all his life long. "I will never forgive Aunt Jane for this," had been his uttered resolve. "I will not believe in—I will not care for—Jane Gair's child," had been his secret, unworded self-reiteration.

He stood in the great, open, west doorway of Cousin Wealthy's barn. He lifted his arms and leaned them upon the wooden bar across it, holding his head down. There was a working in his face. It would have been a shedding of bitter tears, perhaps, with a woman; with this man, it was a swelling of every vein; a drawing of every cord; a red streak shooting athwart the eyeball; a setting the firm teeth tight together.

"This, too, my enemy has done!" was the feeling in him. "All the rest was not enough, but I must feel her even here! I must love; and it must be her child! I was content to go through the world, untrusting, expecting nothing; when she had killed my boy-trust, and sent me out among the hard, hateful things of life; but I must bear this, after all! I must love that child, and long for her; for her who has that lying blood in her veins; whom I *will not* take to my bosom; whom, if I would, I have been set apart from for ever, in my coarse, mean, struggling life. A poor sailor, son of a widow, and she the rich merchant's only child! This, too, my enemy has done! I have fought against it without looking at it; now I must grapple it, face to face. 'She sets by you as she

does by her life.' Why did Wealthy say that? Why did my head whirl when she said it? 'Slighting and fault-finding, watching and carping;' yes, I have done all that. I would never let myself see how I loved her; thank God, I never let *her* see! Now, I've got this thing to do; to get through the world with this wind in my teeth; to set my face against it,—and take it. O Say! Say!"

The proud, stern, distrustful spirit groaned out its anguish in one deep, half-smothered moan.

Then he gathered himself up and strode away, as men stride when they would hurry away from a passion.

Down over the rocks, into the deep woods, parallel to the very way Say was taking, a quarter of a mile of underbrush between them—God knows what impassableness between their two suffering hearts!

An hour after, Say lay upon her bed in the red-room, the curtains drawn, and both doors bolted. She cried out all her tears; she spent herself in an ecstasy of shame and misery; then at last she sobbed slow and gently, with a self-pitiful heart-break.

"He will know me better some time—in heaven, maybe; and perhaps God will let me live to do something true and generous by him yet in this world—something to make up,—oh, if I knew! O mother! mother!"

When Rebecca came home, hastening directly when she learned Say had not been at Wealthy's, she found the doors fast and the room silent. The child had fallen asleep. Rebecca went away and waited. By and by she tried again. Still fast; no sound. She went round through what had been her father's room, and pushed away there

a chest of drawers that stood against a rarely-used door. It opened into the narrow closet running between this and the red-room. By this way she entered quietly, and went and drew the curtain softly aside from the bed. There was a crimson face and tangled hair upon the pillows, the chamber hot and close. Rebecca flung the curtains wide, unlocked the entry door and set it open, then lifted the opposite window, and threw back the blinds.

The air, the movement, wakened Say. She turned and opened two swollen, glassy, feverish eyes. She lifted herself suddenly to her elbow, and glanced round as if bewildered.

"Oh," she exclaimed, faintly, with a half-remembrance, "I came home. My—election—O auntie!—my head, I mean—was so bad, I couldn't stop. I came round by the pond."

She shivered a little in the draught of the fresh air. Her eyes looked vague and troubled.

"Would you just—fold up—that tombstone?—O dear what ails me? Shut it up—the door, I mean."

Say was in the first stage of violent fever.

All through the beautiful July days, when the hay-makers were in the fields; through the calm, starry nights, when the dew was rich with perfume; while all over the hills and woods was the gladness of the country summer-time, Say lay there, suffering in the grasp of disease. Her father and her mother came to Hilbury. Jane Gair was forced to it now, and only her own heart and conscience could tell the scourge of punishment that mingled secretly with her natural pain. Ned Blackmere said, when they talked of Say's illness, "She'll die; she's

one of the real ones, and they go to heaven." Gershom Vorse kept his misery within himself, saying and asking little; but they knew daily and nightly at the hill farm how it was at the homestead; for Blackmere took it upon himself to go to and fro bearing the tidings; and a letter that came from Selport, offering Gershom command of a brig upon an African voyage, to sail at four days' notice, was quietly answered, destroyed, and never spoken of. He waited.

Three weeks of fevered pain and clouded consciousness, and then the tide turned, tremblingly, almost imperceptibly, toward life again.

Mr Gair went back to his business. Jane was in a hurry, as soon as Say could bear it, to get her to the seashore. Gershom Vorse went down to Selport, and got a berth for himself and Blackmere, taking a voyage to Cronstadt. Say sat in the great easy-chair, or lay, tired and feeble, on her bed, and let her life come slowly back to her. A comfort came also—came with the one word that had been given her for a purpose—that had rung in her memory through the first bowilderment of her brain—"Elected! elected!" She could bear what she had been *chosen* to bear. With this grain of mustard-seed the whole kingdom came to bloom in her soul. It was her first childlike creeping close into the bosom of the Father. She had known that He was; she had believed His truth given to the world, and taught her, through others. Now she found Him—felt Him as she never had before. She was "as one whom his mother comforteth." Her bodily state helped this. With exhaustion comes a

peace; it is when we are strong that we can suffer keenest.

Gershom came to say good-bye.

"Shall I let him come up?" said Aunt Joanna. "Are you well enough to-day?"

A pink tinge came to the pale face. She caught her breath a little quickly; then she said, quietly, "Yes."

This, also, she must bear.

There was no disdain of her pretty daintiness now. Gershom's face was very gentle, as he approached her, sitting there, in the warm, open window, with roses on the sill, and some especially sweet, late buds lying on the lap of her white-frilled wrapper, contrasting delicately, in their pink and green, with the soft, pure muslin. The offending little foot was thrust out, too, unconsciously, upon its cushion, slippered with blue and golden brown, in embroidery of silk and satiny kid; but he saw only the kind, calm eyes that looked up, meeting his; and the white hand, grown so slender, that reached itself out toward him.

There was a change in her, beside the changes of her illness. There was a quietude, a repose, that was not all of feebleness. She recognised it in herself. She would never be abashed at him again; she would never be in a flurry lest she should displease him; all that was laid at rest; she had faced the truth; she had borne its life-thrust, and the touch of truth had set her free. She knew now what lay between them; she thought she knew what he had given her; a "liking" merely, and a sort of pity, he should give her more—respect.

"You've had a hard time, Say," he said, as he came and stood beside her.

"But it is very pleasant getting well."

It seemed to the stout sailor, looking at her as she sat there, that the getting well had not been very rapid.

"Blackmere sent you these." A basket of mountain raspberries, that Gershom held in his left hand.

"Mr Blackmere is very kind. Tell him, please, how much I thank him."

"You've won him over, however you managed it," said Gershom, lightly. It was hard for him this meeting, and this good-bye; he must get through it as he could.

A little touch upon the secret misery made Say wince.

"I don't *manage*," she said, with emphasis. "I'm glad if he likes me. I like him very much. He's a good, brave, generous man. And"—she stopped. She had been very near saying, with the old impulse, "And he's your friend, Gershie."

"And—what?" said Captain Vorse.

"I should know it from what you think of him, if I couldn't see it myself. You're hard to please, you know, Gershom."

"Am I? I've had hard luck, sometimes," the sailor answered.

This was coming closer, though, than either wished.

"I'm glad you're better, Say. And I'm glad to know it before I go. I've come to say good-bye. I'm going up the Baltic."

Say spoke not a word. She knew that, parting now, they were to part for years,—for all, perhaps. She knew

it would be long before she should have another summer in Hilbury ; their chances might never coincide again ; and Gershom never came to Hill Street ; she could no longer wonder why, or ask it of him.

All this was best so, still she could not speak.

"You look very sober, Say. Give me one of your 'good words' to go with." He spoke with that forced lightness still ; the strong man's pain clutching secretly at his heart also.

Then Say looked up. She had a word for him. A word she had thought to send him, if she should be going to die, when she came out of that confusion and wandering into the consciousness that life hung trembling and uncertain ; when she knew, as well as those around her, that the last might soon come ; when she read her mother's look, that bent over her in an agony ; when her father's presence at her bedside told the why ; when she saw in the tender, wistful, saddened eyes of the kind aunts, their fear for her ; when her life and all the love and hope and pain of it lay on one side, and death stood waiting close upon the other ; and in the twilight between the worlds, she saw things as they only see them, who go down into the very shadow of the sunless gloom, and stand with feet in the very wave-break of the dark sea, and thence look backward !

She had a word for him. She would give it now. A brightness came into her face, an earnest self-forgetfulness. She put her hand out again, and he took it.

"God was in the pain, also, Gershom !"

He knew in his soul that she was pure and true. He

knew in his soul that he loved her. He knew that his very hold upon heaven lay with her. A strange look glowed in his eyes for a moment as he stood over her, her hand in his. That which was in him stirred mightily, and trembled on the breath of an avowal.

Then there came steps upon the stairs, and a voice—
Aunt Jane's.

His secret went back into his soul again.

They said good-bye, and he went away.

Threads cross, and break, and entangle; the pattern runs away. Yet God's eye is over the loom, His finger is upon the wheels!

been accorded. Mrs Topliff cut her very short in a twinkling, had a sudden word for her coachman, and Jane was behind her elbow again before she quite guessed at it; alone presently, midway down the steps.

She was used to it; she was thankful for the little she got. To this abjectness had she come—this absolute vulgarity of soul—through patient truckling to the vulgar airs of those whom she mistakingly believed to be great people.

There was a quiet room on the same floor with themselves, into which Say was sometimes invited, where she felt herself in an atmosphere of truer elegance and refinement than within the charmed circle of the "Topliff set," when they sanctified, for a brief half hour, a certain piazza corner—mere boards and railing when the spell was off, and open to any common comer; or than, even tucked cosily between the sumptuous cushions and blankets of the brett, driving *tête-à-tête* with its august owner.

It was the room of an elderly lady, a widow, and her maiden sister—persons, necessarily, not of the gay set, but indisputably above the prevailing tone of it, and deferred to, in position, by people of that, or of any set whatever. There are individuals like these, who make their own genus. Say was happier here, among their books and pictures, their gatherings of leaves and flowers, and stones and shells, than she could be anywhere now, since Hilbury was done with.

It was literally the "*crème de la crème*" who had the privilege of this parlour—"Topsy" people; people who "growed," who moved in and out among those below,

whose place was where they chose it, but who showed their true metal only when rung against like coin ; people who drew out Say's best, helped her to ideas and facts, enlarged the world to her, material and human. Among them she learned one thing, that much of her former experience had tended to give her doubt of, that people may be true, and yet genial ; that the polite world is not all sham. She thought of Gershom Vorse in these days ; she wished he might be here ; she felt it hard for him that life should give him nothing better than it did. She remembered, with a clutching pain and shame at her heart, the terrible words of Aunt Prue : " She has managed him out of his home, and away from me ; she has managed him into a hard, dangerous, distasteful life ; " she—Say's mother ! Ah, she could only be half happy ever again !

The way was opened for her into a wider life after her return to the city. This winter was not just like the other winters she had known. She was intimate still at Mrs Gorham's ; people met her there who had passed her by in general society, where they had seen her tricked out, like scores of other girls, to be looked at, and wearing the tell-tale expression on her unfeigning face of a vain anxiety, a mortified weariness. They saw her differently ; she was different. She began to have friends. She was asked to new places. She ceased to be slighted, or half noticed, anywhere. Mrs Topliff could neither snub nor patronise where the Gorhams and the Grays quietly acknowledged. Say had " things real " now ;—these things, the outside appearance of which she cared

a thing for a woman to feel blithe about? To-day, she turned her back upon her youth; it was all behind her now. She set her face, of compulsion, downward over the hill of life; she had passed the crest; the waters flowed the other way. They came no longer, springing from sweet fountains, to meet her; they ran from, and outran her. She might not choose; she might not even pause. Why should she have this nameless gladness at her heart?

She turned to her glass, and tried to feel herself old.

"I've got a gray hair somewhere; saw it a week ago; I *am* old," she said to herself. "And yet I feel, to-day, like a child."

Everybody told Joanna that she kept her youth. She knew it; she felt the spring of it within. She wondered sometimes, as she wondered at this moment, how it was, and why. It seemed, she said to herself, as if a freshness in her had been kept hermetically sealed—waiting for something, for some festival-time that was to come—something in her that was unfulfilled, that would not let life wholly ripen, that forbade it to decay.

"September—October—November, even. What matter is it which, if summer weather lasts? I *am* a child." She had turned now to her window again, looking out with pleasure sweet and new, and for ever young, on the beautiful hills and far-stooping sky, that had encircled her life these five-and-thirty years. "I *am* a child still," she said, with an exulting defiance; "God's child, with His eternity before me, and the good in it, that I have been waiting for, and coming to, all these years, that, after all, are nothing!"

Leaning thus, and looking out, with this recognised joy, that had been but a nameless impulse, rooting itself blessedly in her heart, and growing into her face, as real joys do, she saw Gabriel Hartshorne come quickly out at the front gate of the farm-house, and turn his steps up-hill.

Every sense was sharp in her to-day ; her intuitions keen to grasp things drawing near.

"He is coming here," she said to herself. "He wants us. Something has happened there. And, yes! Mary Makepeace is away."

Mary Makepeace had been gone three days of the ten that Gabriel had given her to visit her old home—a stage journey of a day and a half, eastward, among the hills. It would take three days to get her back again.

Joanna met Gabriel at the side door. His face was pale and his manner hurried.

"My father! Something is wrong with him, and I've nobody there but Abby and Hiram. Will you come down?"

"Yes, Gabriel, instantly." Joanna's face was earnest and pale as his, so bright as it had been a moment ago.

Gabriel turned, without further word, and walked quickly down toward his home again. Joanna hastened into the house and found Rebecca. The two women lifted their gingham bonnets from the entry-pegs and followed.

How she blessed her five-and-thirty years, in that moment when her thought flashed back across fifteen of them, recalling the hour of her friend's first bitter trouble, when she had been but a girl, and Prue, the woman, had been

privileged to help him ! How her heart sprang with half-acknowledged selfishness of joy, feeling that there was none nearer now than she to give him aid and comfort ! She claimed this secretly of life, claiming no more, that, stand at such distance as they might each from the other, none should come between. So she was satisfied. Anything other would have been outrage. She knew God would not let it be !

" I 'm old," she was inwardly saying, in the midst of her real pain and anxiety for Gabriel. " I 've got a gray hair somewhere. I 'm thirty-five to-day. I can be his friend, I can help him always, and he will be sure to come to me."

That was enough to be glad for.

They went in at the open farm-house door. Gabriel met them in the great kitchen, coming out of his father's bedroom.

" I must go to the Bridge myself. Hiram is slow and blundering, and the doctor may be anywhere. I shall find him, and come back as soon as possible. Will you come and stay with him ?"

They followed him into the old man's room. It was easy to see what was the matter. One fallen eyelid,—one corner of the mouth drawn down,—the soul gone out one-half of him,—he lay there, speechless and helpless.

There were tears in the women's eyes as they looked at him, and then at Gabriel. Gabriel's were sad, but clear and strong. He knew that the end was coming—the end of his long, faithful, loving work ; the end, also, of all

darkness and feebleness for him who had dwelt under the cloud so long.

They bathed, and chafed, and laid warm things about him; did what they knew; and then they sat and watched.

In three-quarters of an hour, Gabriel came back with the doctor.

There was little to do. It might be a question of hours or of days; it could not be a question of life or death for long. There were few words said among them after the doctor had given his directions and gone away. They quietly arranged things, or things fell naturally into arrangement after the necessity. One must go home for a while; one would stay. Joanna took, with silent decision, her right of precedence. Was she not the elder? Truly, there were almost three years between these two women, both so well past thirty.

Rebecca went home; she would come again by and by. Joanna stayed, watching by the stricken man, while Gabriel ate, as he could, his delayed breakfast. Then she owned she had not eaten hers, and changed places with him, seating herself at his board.

It was strange—it was sad and solemn; but it was very sweet. The morning joy could not die wholly out of her heart. She was here with him; he relied upon her; she was more to him than any other woman in the world. This was the birthday-gift God gave to her.

Hiram went away to the farm work; Abby betook herself to kitchen and dairy. These two, Gabriel and Joanna, were left to their watch.

Soft womanly touches laid all things tenderly, straight,

and comfortable. Prompt, quiet hands administered all that could be given. Friendly woman-eyes met the man's. Warmly, silently, heart and soul were very near. There had been no such presence in Gabriel's home, partaking the inner life of it, since the mother went away. Had there been ever? Should there be ever again?

Holiest joy, tenderest grief, touch often. If there be a joy left, sorrow magnetises it to a counterpart depth of blessedness. There was a peace in Gabriel Hartshorne's soul beyond where pain could reach.

The warm September day climbed to its highest glory, and faded down—down to a still gorgeousness, gathered among the western hills. Rebecca was with them now. The two sisters would remain in the house all night. Gabriel would not let them watch,—that was his office. He would call them, if he needed them.

He could not keep her from his watch. She was there with him, and he knew it, though doors were closed between them, and the silence of sleep lay upon the house. He knew she did not sleep. He felt her wakeful thought with him all through the midnight. There were but two hours wherein he had a sense of being alone. Those two Joanna slept, sitting in the great old-fashioned easy-chair by the best room window. She had risen noiselessly from Rebecca's side, unable to close her eyes, leaving her sister quietly unconscious, and at last relinquished sleep had come to her.

He knew she was coming. It was early dawn, and there had been no sound. But the felt presence was with him again; his watch was no longer solitary. As the

morning paled out of the midnight, and the stars faded, and the first blush came over the gray, he heard, without surprise, her step approaching, the soft sweep of her garments stirring the air of the hushed house. He stood up in the doorway as she came, and held his hand out.

"No change?"

"No change."

Could the heart help it if, out of its complex meanings, a second wound itself to the words, and came thrilling after, like a blessed echo?

No change between these two.

It might never be said plainer,—the tangle of life might go on,—the flaw from that twisted thread of long ago might never be righted into perfectness; yet the inevitable truth, the pattern divined across the fault, flashed so with now and then chance lights, and comforted them, they scarce knew how.

Joanna staid in the kitchen, drew out the glowing embers from under the ashes in the wild, wide, old-fashioned chimney, heaped them into a living mass, with tremulous, spirit-breath of fire,—set something thereon,—flitted between pantry and dairy, and brought Gabriel presently a great, steaming, odorous breakfast-cup of such coffee as she could make.

"If you will take some too," he said, as she put it into his hand. "I don't think you have slept much more than I."

So she fetched another cup, and poured herself some; and they broke their fast together.

Hiram and Abby appeared presently. The world was going to be alive again.

"Now, you must go and rest," Joanna said. "Rebecca will be here. I will call you in an hour."

By that promise she prevailed, and Gabriel left her, to faithful watch, and most sweet thoughts.

The morning wore along, the hour went by.

"I think he looks more as if he knew," said Joanna, coming from the bedside.

There had been a stupor like a sleep; now there was a clearer look, an opened eye, in that half the aged face where soul yet lingered so strangely, the dead half lying so fearfully dead.

A glance met Gabriel's as he came close. There could be no sign; it was but a look—asking, beseeching, recognising sound, a quicker consciousness than, in the twilight of his faculties, the poor old man had shown for years.

Gabriel got the Bible that lay upon the bureau-top. He opened where there was a mark between the leaves. Standing by his father's bed, he read some verses straight on from where he had read last, forty-eight hours ago. The asking eye calmed,—the smitten face wore a look of listening,—the one hand pressed Gabriel's as he took it, when he had ended reading. Bending above him, the strong tender man spoke, like a child, the simple words of the Lord's Prayer. It had been his morning service with his child-like father for many years. Joanna bowed her head, and the tears fell. "The best Christian in Hilbury," her heart repeated.

The morning wore along. The church-bells rang. The

people streamed by up the road in country waggons. The Sabbath warmth and stillness brooded, and a rest lay upon the land. There was a hush and quiet in the house where Death was coming. All through the early day and the bright noontide, that seeming of sleep was upon the sick man. Then again, at afternoon, the faint rousing,—the glimmer of a life-light over the half-blank face,—the eye that searched, and wandered, and besought,—the hand moving restlessly till the strong one came and clasped it. And Gabriel said, gently, as the returning waggons began to roll down hill, "I will go, father, for the minister. It is Sunday. It is communion day."

So he went; and Rebecca made ready. When he came back, bringing the preacher with him—a man of grave, pure face, and somewhat sternly-reverend bearing—there was the little table by the bedside, with the white napkin covering it, holding fair bread, and red, symbolic wine.

There was a voice of prayer and blessing. Christ's dear words were uttered, and the bread was broken, and the wine was poured; and the son held cup and morsel, as he had been wont to do, to the old, helpless lips; and the women bowed and wept.

There was a fragment that the old man could not take; it was only a crumb, indeed, from the Lord's feast that might be given him; and Gabriel, without pause of doubt or question, shared the symbol, as he shared the gift. Before he had done this, in the church, when the old man proffered it childishly, or dropped a portion unpartaken, Gabriel would not let it fall, like common waste, but ate it with a quiet reverence. To-day, still calmly, question-

lessly, he did more. For the first time in his life he lifted the wine to his own lips, that had spoken no church-vow; and the Puritan pastor beheld it, saying no word. It was a pure assurance, a holy audacity; had not his whole life been a vow? Was not, in this hour, this cup of a last supper held out to him above them all?

Rebecca joined in the gracious rite; the minister offered its emblems to her; it was her proper privilege; Joanna sat by, and put forth no hand. But her soul was with the soul of him she loved; and, inwardly, she drank with him; the selfsame pain—the selfsame joy.

After that, the day went down. The light of a human life went also down. Slowly, flickeringly, flushing a little at the last, with a parting ray that told the coming night was as truly over the verge a coming morning, it changed and settled to the moveless Peace.

In the dropping shadow they went out, at last, and left him—alone with his dead.

And a cry of the human went up from that closed room,—a word gasped up from earth to heaven,—

“I’ve been true to you, mother! mother!”

CHAPTER XI

THE SCARLET OAK.

THEY came again, and set the house in order for him, for the burying. They made all sweet, and pure, and orderly. They placed flowers about; common home flowers, late-blooming; colourless asters and petunias; Joanna brought one white rose from her own window, turned with glistening myrtle, tied with a ribbon. She came to Gabriel and laid it on his hand; "It is for the mother," she said softly, and turned away. There was a thought in it the simple-spoken woman would not put in words. "For the new bridal; the golden wedding that was in heaven this day."

Gabriel came to her an hour or two before the service. He was freshly dressed, in pure white linen, and his Sunday's suit that was always black. He had in his hand a needle that he had found somewhere, and threaded. Mary Makepeace, just come, was in her own chamber.

"I must trouble you," he said, and held out a loosened wristband from which a button had fallen,—a simple, common need, coming in to assert itself among deeper need and loss, as such things do in this strange life of ours.

Joanna had been sitting by the window. She turned and came to him. She had filled tenderer office for him, to-day, than this ; she had ministered closer to his heart's asking ; yet there was something in this homely, womanly service he came to beg of her, finding no other to perform, that moved and thrilled her curiously, even to a girl's shyness. He held his hand out, and hers touched it, passing back and forth, at her slight task. They stood close together. It was such a bit of help as a sister might give a brother, a wife, a husband. Suddenly she felt the colour come up higher and higher into her face, that grew angry in shame at itself ; at such unfitting hour to be making, foolishly, much of a thing like this. Yet she was helpless ; she, with her five-and-thirty years. She would not do her work at halves ; she fastened her thread properly, and broke it cautiously, with the moisture springing to her very finger tips, and a beating in her ears.

What could he think of her ?

He only said with his gentle dwelling accent, invariable with the words, "Thank you, Joanna !"

She could but hope he would forget ; there was quite enough to make him. But he did not forget, he only put by.

For a fortnight after they saw little of him. The time of helping and necessity was past ; he had Mary Makepeace with him for all service ; they were only neighbour-women again—he, a man living alone, secluded with a grief.

Of any definite difference these events might make to her, Joanna never let herself think ; but she was per-

turbed—restless with a secret something that was not joy. How could it be? Yet that had never been still in her,—only overborne by tenderer, solemn feeling,—since that birthday morning when it sprang, like a mysterious premonition, unlooked for in her heart. The friendly calm, the calm that she had thought for life, was leaving her; since that foolish miserable moment she had been afraid of herself; afraid of him; she held back suddenly from what she had so eagerly claimed in virtue of her years; she let Rebecca go foremost, now in neighbourly kindness. She said to herself she was a fool, getting into a girlish silliness now when she had lived out half her life,—now, just when her friendship might be quietest and strongest, when it was bringing her toward Gabriel, as they should come nearer to each other, now that they both were growing old.

She was odd, impulsive; she made Rebecca think of the old Joanna with her unreasonableness and whims, her petulance, her sudden despondencies, her gaieties as sudden.

It went on so for weeks, and the autumn ripened. The early glories came and went; the maples flamed, the elms mellowed, oak and ash burnished themselves in bronze and crimson, and the winds came and fresheted all the waysides and woodpaths with a down-pour of colour.

Over in the great orchard, beside the boulder-tower, the brave old scarlet oak burst out with tardy fires. Like a passion or a joy come late into life, it filled all the impoverished landscape with a deep strong warmth of

radiance. Above it the blue hung tenderly; it was a picture of hope, a promise, a type of grand and sure fulfilment.

"It has waited to be more beautiful than all; it will last away into the winter. I'll go and bring home branches, and pile them on my hearth to warm me by," Joanna said, looking out through thinning boughs that opened toward the distant splendour.

She felt the life-meaning of it; the correspondence of its hope was in her soul,—nameless, restless, stirring fitfully like branches flashing in an autumn wind, but large and real, planted there beside a rock.

She came down-stairs with shawl and hood upon her arm. "I'm going off; out to the great oak orchard to be glad, and to bring home glory. Look there!" And she pointed out at the opened door to the great dome of sunlight and colour rearing itself against a space of sky between the hills.

"But look here!" whispered Rebecca.

"Yah!" responded Joanna, in a snarl below her breath.

Mrs Prouty was within the yard, coming up over the chips with the security of a saint in her ordained place, it being her special afternoon for visits, and with most intimate aim at the side door-stone, whereon Joanna was just about to set her foot. Country civility could not avail itself of "business," or "engagements," and walk off, straight before the comer's eyes, into the empty fields. Gladness and glory must give way, she must come in with her guest, and pretend to be pleased.

Mrs Prouty and the Deacon had been down to see Gabriel. A visit—*ex officio*—of condolence and exhortation; a fag-end of business appended, which, leading the “men-folks” off towards the barn and cider mill, the good lady had bid Mary Makepiece goodbye, and “guessed she would step on up the hill, and sit with the Gayworthys till the Deacon came along.”

People whose lives jog on in uneventful rounds, are greatly stirred at changes happening to their neighbours. Mrs Prouty was exercised as to the “what next” with Gabriel Hartshorne.

“All alone in the world as he was now, and nothing to bind him anywhere, would he stay and carry on the farm, or would he git res’less, and start off?”

The great world suddenly spread itself out to Joanna’s thought, hearing this question as it had looked to her that summer day from the mountain top. It was too wide. Too many things were possible. Her life that had been concentrated in one point, might scatter itself. How should she bear it if it did? Oh, a friend was a troublesome thing! There was no outward ownership in him. He might take himself off, stretching out your heart-strings after him to the ends of the earth, and you should have no right to cry out. An impotent restlessness, an angry impatience seized her again. She hated Mrs Prouty. She almost snapped at her; and catching herself at it, decided not to try to talk, but left the conversation to Rebecca, and sat by, her elbow pressed very hard down upon the window sill, and one foot treading savagely on the other’s toes.

"It's my idee;" she caught the words up here, after a confused babble about the farm, and the expense of hired folks in the house, and the difficulties to a single man; during which her thought had hurled itself away on its own tangent of pain,—“It's my idee—he's been tied down so close all his life—he'll go somewers now. I donno's I've any clear callin' to mention it, but I s'pose you'd know as quick as anybody if there was anything in it. Mary Makepeace did say something to-day about Californy. She's got a brother there; and Gabriel's been asking questions, it seems. She kinder mistrusts he's got a notion of it in his head; and the Deacon says the farm is ruther run out, some of it. He thinks very well of Gabriel, the Deacon doos; though he isn't an experimental Christian. But I hope, now father and mother has forsaken him, he'll look to the Lord to take him up.”

Hot indignant drops started to Joanna's eyes; her cheeks flamed; she whisked herself suddenly off her seat, and into the kitchen, where she put her head into the oven, to look on after gingerbread that had been cooling for fifteen minutes in the pantry.

She was saved return; the Deacon's chaise seesawed and clattered itself, ricketty, to the door-stone, and Mrs Prouty bustled out. She never kept the Deacon waiting. The ineffable complacency of the perfect woman spread itself over her face, and her features levelled themselves into a plane of benignity, as if they had been suddenly flatironed, as she took her privileged seat by his side, and departed, sweetly, to remaining duties.

Joanna shut the door in a silent rage, and darted up

stairs. Rebecca had some housewifely business in the kitchen-chamber, and followed.

"I wonder," she said, simply, with her head in a linen chest, close by Joanna's chamber-door, "whether Gabriel really does think of going away."

"*You too!*"

It came with a sharpness so like a shriek that Rebecca involuntarily sprang to her feet, and entered her sister's room. To see her fling herself passionately down along the bed,—shawl, hood, and all, in a heap between her arms and under her face.

"Dear child! what is the matter?"

A sob; a little quick gasping laugh; a sob again; a hand stretched out and clutching Rebecca by the wrist; a tempest of tears then; a real shriek, smothered with the head held down between the shawls and pillows.

Rebecca slipped from her grasp, and shut the doors and brought salvolatile. This "old Miss Gayworthy," for the first time in her life, most unexpectedly to herself, yet with the utmost naturalness, was going into hysterics.

"That woman, she always—hears—with her elbows! But to think—that you—shouldn't know any better!"

She knew enough better now. She wondered she had never known before.

She put her arms around her sister, tenderly; she drew her head down on her bosom.

It was all out, there was no help for it; and Joanna gave herself up, recklessly, to the comfort of a dear human sympathy.

"You never told me this," said Rebecca, by and by,

almost reproachfully. She forgot she had never told her sister *that*. We live so close together, and yet so far apart!

"Did you think I would?" cried Joanna, lifting up her head suddenly, with something of the old spirit of whimsicalness. "Did you ever know of a burnt hand I got once, when I was five years old, and nobody ever could find out how? There's the scar; I wonder if you ever saw it before?" and she held up her fair palm, whereon was a whitened seam. "Well! now you've seen it, and I'm come to general confession, and I'll tell you I took up a live coal in it. I wasn't fool enough to tell that though I did it; nor this, not even the smart of it. Only the old hurt began to ache so all of a sudden."

And Joanna laughed and cried again together, and turned herself away, and hid her face in the pillow; all but one crimsoned ear, that looked as if it had been boxed.

After a while, in a smothered voice, with her nose down among the feathers,—

"Aren't you gone? You've got it all now; why don't you go away?" As if she were a dog had come for a bone.

Whereat Rebecca rose silently from the bedside, and went.

An hour after, down stairs, by the sitting-room window, she lifted her eyes from her needlework to see Gabriel Hartshorne coming, with his grave air and steady step, up among the red and yellow maple leaves. At the same instant, something in a shawl and hood whisked out at

the end door, and flitted down the barn road, by the garden fence.

Years ago, she had been left just so, to bear her own hurt; now, she must receive the first pang for another.

Gabriel was come to tell them something. Of himself, perhaps, this very news. It did not seem impossible to Rebecca that it might be true. In the prime of life,—alone,—with untried capacity yet waiting within him,—what wonder would it be if this man, always of a power beyond the scope he found for it, should go forth from his solitude into the great world at last?

She stood up, and glanced after the flitting figure. Safe; skimming along the cart-path through the spring meadow already; making straight for the oak-orchard and the great scarlet tree. Then she went out and welcomed Gabriel, and drew him in, lest, left to wait an instant on the door-stone, he should turn and see what she saw.

He came in, and sat down; sat silent for some moments. He was apt to come and sit so in those days, and the sisters never took it strange, or hastened him with speech.

"I've been thinking," he began, after a while, "a great deal lately; and I've come to talk some of my thoughts out."

"You can. You know that, Gabriel."

"I know, and I do; all that can be talked of. It seems to me sometimes as if my work was done here,—for the present."

"I dare say it does, just now," she answered.

"The farm would be as well let out, no doubt. I don't seem to feel spirit for what it needs. The soul of the old

place is gone. And yet—it's *home* to me. You can't tell *how*, Rebecca! Out in the world somewhere there may be something waiting for me to do and to get. If I could go and bring back money. Rebecca, I'm not well off; and the farm won't make me richer. Things have run down a good deal in all these years. If I could ever stand in the right position, there might be"—— Gabriel paused. He had not come to think *all* his thoughts out, after all.

She wondered to herself if she guessed rightly. This was a proud man, with the grand, honest pride that keeps men upright in mind, though nobly humble, also, of soul. They—the Gayworthy sisters—were the heiresses of Hilbury, with money and culture more than their neighbours; more than this faithful son who had waited God's time; who seemed not ever to find his own time.

"Hilbury would miss you sorely," she said, with a tremble of regret and sympathy.

"Not as I should miss Hilbury," he answered, in a sudden, strong way, that was almost a spoken sob, the feeling burst so with it.

"My whole heart is here, as my life has been; and my grave must be here, as theirs are."

They were silent for a few minutes, and then Rebecca asked,—

"Where would you go, Gabriel?"

"To the place from which I could come quickest back again,—to the gold country."

Upon this moment might hang all. It was laid upon her to speak. But how?

Out of her true, friendly heart.

"We might bear it. But it would be very hard. Gold does not buy friendship, Gabriel, or make it any richer. You might come back to find more graves. You might not come till we should all be old. Don't go, Gabriel."

He flushed up a strange, earnest, appealing look to her face. Some women might have misunderstood it. She herself might have wondered at it, but for what she had learned this day. She read it truly now. If other lips had so besought! If this, or something like, yet more might be, in another heart for him!

She was sure. With her pure insight, she discerned it all. She spoke to his silence. She reached straight down, and touched the secret of his soul, with a quick, sweet, electric surprise.

"If you must go"—she spoke slow and steadily, yet with a low thrill of womanly timidity—"if you find you *must*,—come and tell Joanna yourself. I don't dare!"

Two breaths were audible in the still room:—a fluttering respiration of a woman, frightened at her words the moment they had fallen; a deep, hard pant out of the bosom of a man.

Rebecca stood by the window; she had risen and turned her face away, outward. A step came up to her—a hand lay on her shoulder—the strong, eager breathing was in her ear.

"Where is Joanna?"

"Away down there, in the oak orchard. Gone to the old tree."

Gabriel snatched his hat, and strode away.

She heard him coming, sitting there, under the spread of the great, flaming boughs, and looking off from this lower edge of the orchard, over the yellow stubble of corn stalks, down the slope, to the still, sweet river glen, and across to the rising uplands beyond—the fields that joined the Hartshorne farm, and had been rented and used by Gabriel.

She sat there, trying to take it all in: how Hilbury would look without him; what her life would be, and whether she could bear it. She took up this live coal of pain, and tried how long she could hold it; and a cry was rising to her lips as the anguish grew too sharp; and then she heard him coming.

She sat still, moving not a hair—not even to look up—as one cowers under the coming of a blow. She waited to be crushed.

“Joanna!” And two hands were held to her.

She put hers up, and let him take them; but she lifted not her face.

“Dear friend, I have come to tell—to ask you—something.”

“Ask, Gabriel.”

He seated himself beside her on the fallen leaves. Over their heads the red, shifting lights of that late forest fervour; in their hearts, what ripeness of strong love, waiting the frost-touch for its perfect revelation!

“I have had thoughts—I don’t know whether they are wise ones; but my life turns here. I must decide what the rest of it shall be; and I have come to-day to tell my thoughts to my best friends. I am not yet old; there

may be something that I can do in the world. Ought I to go and find it? And come back—that, of a certainty, God willing—when I have found and done it?”

“Why do you come and say this to me?” The face still turned away, and the eyes downward; a strange, forced tone in the voice.

“Because—I must. Joanna, I have said all to you, always.”

“No, you have not!” It was a cry of the heart, in which the words came. “And this—you know I cannot bear it!”

Then she started to her feet, and flung herself away from him. For a moment the great surge of joy that swelled up in him would not let him speak. The crimson flush was on his brow—the tardy glory of his life had crowned him. She stood, scarlet in her woman’s shame, in the low, red sunlight, under the scarlet tree.

“Why don’t you shame me? Why don’t you pay me back? Why don’t you tell me what I told you, years ago?”

She pelted the sentences at him, over her turned shoulder; she scourged herself with the smiting questions, in their rapid tones, like lashings.

But before she had finished, he held her in his arms—in his strong, tender arms, that had waited, with their first pure longing, all these years.

“God gives at last!”

The golden afternoon light, the autumn glow, were over and about them. And a like light shone radiant in

the hidden beauty that their life had woven ; the pattern, different from their own purpose, traced after God's thought for them. Had any brightness been left out ?

"We might have been together in it all. So many years we lost," said Gabriel.

"We have been, Gabriel, close together always in our hearts ; the years are not lost." So she answered.

CHAPTER XII.

VIEWS, ACROSS AND BACK.

IN the narrow city streets, people who cannot see clouds, and fields, and hills, see something else. There are other "views" for them than the brick-vistaed bit of far-off green, or the pinched gleam that comes to them of the broad sunsets. They have human life. They look in at opening doors, and at uncurtained windows. They have views into homes, imaginative peeps into hearts "across the way," there is always something; an arrival, a departure, a funeral, a wedding, or the daily, uneventful coming and going of the same steps in the same rounds—the apparition of the same faces at the same panes—that make the quiet continuance of things that seem as if they had always been, and always must be.

There are lives that look out so, and borrow; feed continually upon the life they find about them, love, and pity, and suspect—weave histories and hopes—find all the play of human interests and affections, in the little cognisance they get of human creatures, whose real haps are but a guessed-out story; whose very names and voices they may never come to know.

Grace Louder sat so, day by day, in her little corner

window, and read, as best she could, the simple chronicles that evolved themselves in her sight; having a great joy and interest in the activities so unlike her own helplessness—the vigorous living she could never share.

Diagonally across the square was old Crossman's; and his second story corner room, that corresponded to her own, had a never-failing fascination of mystery; an occasional very absorbing charm of attraction in its aspect.

Nobody could get anything out of old Crossman; he let his rooms or shut them up, or hid himself away in them, in his surly, solitary living; and "nobody," as Mrs Hopeley said, "knew the who, or the how, or the why, or the wherefore." There was something odd, and quaint, and strangely pleasant to Grace, in the glimpses, the sunlight glancing in and reflecting itself through the windows, opening, like hers, from street to street, given her now and then of this opposite chamber. Sometimes for months—for a year and more even—it had been a blank, with its closed blinds; then the life came to it again, and the light was let in, and the curious feeling came over her that friends had got back.

She did not pry with intent of impertinence, but she could not help looking; and when the day poured in and out, or the lamplight shone there and the curtains were not drawn, as they hardly ever were, for hours of an evening, she could not help seeing.

Antique-looking pictures, queer things in cane and carved work, shells, a parrot in a cage, which, whether it went away in a trunk when the lodgers took themselves off, or was secreted in the rear with old Crossman, Mrs

Hopeley avowed herself "conundered" to tell; a narrow bed—a fixture in the recess of the wall, in whose like space was her own closet—overspread with covering of some strange, rich, oriental stuff; a painted lantern hung from the ceiling; over the mantel some foreign-looking weapons, fastened against the wall; books, instruments, spy-glasses, maps; every available space crowded with what seemed the heterogeneous drift of a roving and busy life, that had gathered itself, somehow, into this little cove of temporary rest.

In the midst of it all, two men, as curiously unlike each other as any other two things there. Father and son? It was hardly possible. Brothers? It could not be. Master and servant? The one was a gentleman, but the other was too much of a man. Companions they seemed, and friends; friends that had found each other across some social chasm; there was a rough deference from the older to the younger, that, beside his different bearing, evidenced this. The older man came first, always; sometimes he would be there for days and weeks alone; then the parrot hung from the front window, and he would sit there and smoke his pipe; the very puffs of it came, often, in pleasant weather, through the opened sashes into Grace's room.

Grace used to sit and sew; and these two, with a dozen yards between them,—with two utterly distinct and unknown lives holding them apart,—thought many thoughts about each other in a dreamy way, that was hardly an active, conscious interest; but that made, none the less, a real place for each in the other's living sympathies.

It was strange how much they thought. The gray,

rough man wondered at himself, half impatiently, when he found himself missing, uneasily sometimes, the little figure seated at her quiet tasks, on the unfrequent days when she worked away from home. He watched her coming back in the dusk after her day's labour; and he saw, with a strong man's half-comprehending pity, that the little thing was lame. She knew his tread upon the pavement when he came up the street; and was glad when he went in at the door, and listened for him to fling up the window, for, winter or summer, he did that; he was a hardy, out-door man, who could not endure stifling.

It was, somehow, pleasant for her to know that there was such a grand, defiant strength in the world; to her, a feeble, little, lonely creature, that had never known father or brother. She felt safer in the nights when these neighbours had come back, and the corner room was occupied; she thought if there was a fire, or robbers should get in, she could call out loud, and help would come; she said her prayers, and slept trustfully; but this was good also.

Once, on a winter day, something happened that caused this feeling—of pity and reliance—to grow suddenly, from a secret sense, into a proved reality.

The narrow sidewalks were slippery with ice; more slippery, in these by-streets, with long "slides" which the boys had made; ground glassy smooth, with fine scored lines, tempting to all young feet. One of these stretched from below Mrs Hopeley's, quite out along the fronts of two houses, to the kerbstone at the corner. The widow hadn't the heart to put ashes on it; she and Grace both loved to watch the merry groups that gathered there;

rosy little girls, in hoods and mittens, with a run and a hop and a stoop, launching themselves, with small momentum, along the shining way; boys dashing, with fearless velocity, upright from end to end; even a grown man, now and then, taking it in his way, as if he didn't mean it, an old-times feeling getting him, nevertheless, by the heel. They had only, in their comings and goings, to keep the inside; a narrow path to be sure, but room enough; so the slide remained and widened.

And, late one afternoon—late, counting by the rapid-falling twilight of a winter's day—Grace Lowder and her crutch came round the corner, just as a great grocer's boy, with big boots, and clumsy elbows set a-kimbo, and a parcel under his arm, plunged himself along, turning about and ending his slide backward upon the glare.

The wind drew through the street, and carried Grace, with her insecure footing, a few steps further than she meant. Exactly where she met it full,—big boy, and bundle, elbows, boots, and all. The little figure was borne down; the slender crutch, dashed from her hand, flew out into the street, and a wheel went over it.

"Blast me!" came a strong voice from above, "if ever I see a little craft like that capsized, and the sticks knocked out of her, that fashion!"

All but the first ejaculation was uttered tortuously in the narrow, intestinal windings of back entry and staircase, down which the speaker plunged, making his impetuous way out of the crooked little building opposite, and then a stout pair of arms were round the delicate shoulders, and there was a breath pungent with pipe odours, but

with nothing worse, close to the girl's cheek, and she was lifted tenderly—not to her feet, poor child, that might not be, but to an upright posture—and borne across the narrow, slippery sidewalk, to Mrs Hopeley's door.

Some strange, dormant instinct stirred in Grace Lowder's heart, as she balanced herself between her one strong foot and the other hand, catching the door-post, and was forced to lean, also, partly against the stalwart support that would not relinquish her,—the sweet, womanly sense of being protected by manly power,—the power that had never been about her for her aid. She had hardly so much as had the touch of a man's hand, the strength of a man's arm given her, momentarily, in all her crippled, helpless, creeping up from childhood. Her mother was all, and she had been gone for years, and then there had been Mrs Hopeley. Beyond these, there had been nothing between her and the Almighty Strength.

She had seen, while she was a child, other children led along by fathers' hands ; a maiden, she had looked on other maidens kept close in brotherly care. She knew there was all this in the world, for others ; this beautiful vigour, made to offset and defend delicate helplessness ; and with her helplessness, that was beyond all ordinary need of woman, she stood alone, with her crutch, and her Father who was in heaven.

She never dreamed of the dearest earthly reliance of all ; that, of course, was not for her ; it had never troubled her with a longing ; but if she could have had a *father*, to care tenderly for her ; the more that she was his poor lame daughter !

This instinct it was that warmed and stirred with the strangeness of its first answering ; she trembled in the great, sturdy arms. If it had been a gentleman, she might have been only shy and thankful ; there would have been, perhaps, no heart-consciousness in it ; it would have been a chance help that she would have known would be forgotten, the instant it was rendered ; but this was not a gentleman, he was only a rough, odd, honest, kindly man, not above her own station ; for age he might have been her father ; there might have been such a one, if God had willed, to cherish her, to feel life even brighter to himself through her, feeble and helpless though she was. All this did not come to her in clear order, as she leaned there, waiting, for that moment ; it was a confused thrill, born of thoughts that had been hers before ; of a nameless missing she had felt of an unknown thing desired.

And Blackmere—you know who it was, as well as I—how did he feel ? The man whom life had hardened, who had had no woman-love, of mother, sister, wife, to keep him gentle for more than a quarter of a century that had gone over him in a stern, hopeless striving with the world.

Three years ago, a girl's hand had held his ; a girl's voice had spoken gentle words to him ; words of a sweet natural faith, that had set his soul, for the time, in a new attitude toward God. Since then he had been less hard ; that, and his one friendship, fervent with all the restrained might of his proud, silent, fiery nature, had begun the salvation which begins by a little sometimes, and afar off. He had doubted ; doubted fiercely, and upbraidingly, as one who felt there ought to be a God, and a

Guidance, and a good in the world ; but who had been hard-used and bewildered, till he was all adrift, and could not make it seem to be ; but he had not positively denied. In his darkest hour, when, with a seeming blasphemy, he had wished that he might "see that Person," it had been the desperate utterance of a goaded soul, longing, instinctively, for the One only possible Redress. The sight of a pure, young, fervent faith, had secretly almost assured him of that whereon it rested. The needle turned ; there must, then, somewhere, be a great Central Pole.

He had never forgotten the old, uncompromising Bible word, invested with such new and gracious meaning, by the sudden insight of a childlike, unseared spirit. It had whispered itself to him in many a moment, since, of pain and danger ; when, by the stringent call of the hour, he had been "elected" to work that only such as he could do. It had been the leaven of the kingdom lying in his soul ; fermenting slowly, to the softening of that hardness which was more an outer crust of habit, now, than any deeper induration. There was a place in him to be touched and occupied with a gentle interest ; and this young feeble creature, with her quiet life, that showed so little joy, and yet such large, abiding peace,—with its beauty of cheerful labour, and its sunniness of content,—had reached and held it.

He had been half afraid, in his returns from sea, that there might be changes at the old corner. That the little needlewoman, with her bright window, her work and her flowers, might be replaced by something common and

unlovely. "My little girl," he had got to call her, in his thoughts. So far as this, even, the human tenderness had repossessed him.

She would have no right to be gone; she belonged to him by a mysterious, unspoken tenure; yet it might be, it would be, like all the rest. This old bitterness tinged his thought as he came homeward, saying nothing of his one secret hope and longing; cherishing it jealously, in silence; bracing himself half resentfully, in advance, against the disappointment and the end of it, that would come sometime,—might come now; wearing so, always, a certain savageness and defiance, still, when he neared the home-port, and came sailing in. He cheered up again, and was grimly jolly, when he had once cast anchor at old Crossman's, and taken a glance around at his bearings, and found the landmarks safe.

"I might have had a child like her," Ned Blackmere said to himself. "I ought to. Wasn't I made strong to take care of something like that?"

So he had sat at his window, and kept his secret life, and smoked his pipe; and there was this wonderful soul asking and answering between those two, who, until to-day, neighbours for years, had never interchanged an outward greeting.

"Land alive! Why, Grace, child, what's happened you?" said Mrs Hopeley, opening the door, and reaching out one hand to help her in, while she hurriedly settled her cap-ribbon with the other, at sight of the "opposite gentleman," as she always called him.

Blackmere somewhat precipitately resigned his charge

to the good woman. Indeed, Grace was aware of a certain quick movement that was not quite like his first gentleness. He was evidently in haste to be off without words.

"Now, of all things!" resumed the voluble house-lady, as he dashed across the street again with only a half-muttered, unintelligible reply to Grace's eagerly-begun acknowledgment—"to think he should go like that, as if a gale of wind had took him, and I never so much as saying, 'I'm beholden,' nor finding out his name to call him by it again! Well, it ain't all in salting tails! You mayn't catch the bird no more, notwithstanding!"

"Why, you've lost your crutch, child, so you have! And, to be sure, there's the opposite gentleman,—to think I shouldn't be able to call him like a Christian after all; and so Christian, and more, as he's behaved,—a-standing on the other corner with the door blowed to and the latch ketched, and no hat on, and the pieces in his hand! Maybe he'll come back. No! there's old Crossman, and he's got in, and took 'em likewise! Well, here's the amberella."

And so Grace got up-stairs. That evening, by the bright light across the way, through the heedlessly unshaded window, she saw, as she drew down her own blind, her new-old friend without a name, busy with the splintered bits of her old crutch, trying evidently if it would join. But he shook his head over it, and made up his face in the shape of a whistle; and she would not stand watching, so she pulled the cambric shade down, and settled herself behind it at her work, with many little curious thoughts glancing through her mind as to what he might do next.

Early the following morning, as Mrs Hopeley was lighting her fire and brushing up her hearth below, there came a ring. The brisk little body answered it in a twinkling. Yet, quick as she was, the opposite gentleman was over opposite again; and on the door-stone sat a basket, and, beside it, a wonderful thing with a crutch-top to it,—Grace's very old crutch-top, with the worn black velvet cover. But such a stick! A slight, dark, rich, strong staff, with queer, delicate carving all up and down it, and a smell of strange spicery clinging to it, and effusing even in the frosty morning air.

"Well, if I ain't conundered now!" she exclaimed, taking them up with a certain hesitancy, and a glance toward old Crossman's closed door, and the window above it, where the curtain *was* down this time.

"Grace! here's the elegantest thing!—stop, I'll bring it up to you, and take away the amberella—and a big basket of great oranges as red as fire! You never see sitch! Come all in a whiff, and gone again, like the what's-his-name-on-two-sticks!"

There were tears in Grace's eyes as she held the beautiful staff in her hand. Such a thing had never happened to her before in all her life. There was something in her heart as she received this gift, dropped for her at the door, such as, perhaps, never stirred in yours, young lady, on whose table waits each morning some dainty offering of homage, and who count up your bouquets and your lovers together.

She would never lean on this but it would seem to her like a kindly human strength. She had a friend in the

world ; there was a thought for her in a great, generous bosom. The world was very rich to-day for this child, who had never had father or brother, who would never have a lover !

The basket was to go back. Grace and Mrs Hopeley decided this ; and the girl gathered her flowers,—her one splendid white lily, with its golden spike, in the broad, green leaf against which it grew ; some tender abutilons, like drops of redder gold ; purple heliotropes and little English violets ; a tea rose-bud, just swelling into its brief perfection ; and some trailing bits of yellow-blossoming vine,—and laid them in it, a mute, delicate thanks.

Mrs Hopeley hoped great things from the instant in which she should deliver it. For the first time in her life, she stood upon her crusty neighbour's doorstep and rung a summons.

The old man came.

"For Mr ——," hesitating, so that anybody but old Crossman must have suggested a name. But he stood with his sharp nose protruding from a jealous crack, and waited for her to say it out by herself, if she could, or give it up. He would have waited a week, morosely revelling in her discomfiture.

"For the opposite—the up-stairs—gentleman, I mean," faltered the poor woman, all of a quiver, and in utter rout.

Crossman grunted, and took it in.

"It ain't all in chances, if you can't turn 'em," sighed Mrs Hopeley to herself, recrossing. "And there's some old sticks would chock anybody's wheels."

"I've gin it in ; but I don't know who to, howbeit, more nor ever."

Mrs Hopeley's adverbs were her colloquial accomplishment. They effected a certain point and dazzle by their recurrence, like skilful dashes upon printed calico.

After this, things went on as of old. The "other gentleman," as Mrs Hopeley called him in her bewildered paucity of knowledge in contradistinction to the "opposite gentleman," who was more regularly opposite—the gentleman to Grace's distinctive perception—came ; and the corner room was bright and cheery for many weeks. Then a trunk and two chests were wheeled away one morning, and the blinds were shut.

Mrs Hopeley had gone out to market, the opposite gentleman knew this, doubtless, for he came very deliberately across the street, his pipe in his mouth, and stopped upon the widow's door-step. Before he rang, Grace, with her light spring, and the quick tapping of her deftly-handled crutch, was on the stairs ; and as he rang, she opened to him.

"I'm going away," began the opposite gentleman, and paused.

"It's very good of you"——

He lifted his eyes, rather, at this.

"To come and let me say good-bye, I mean, and thank you," said Grace, very hurriedly and impetuously following up the awkward ambiguity of her first words. "I have wanted to, so much."

"I came to see if you'd do something for me while I'm gone," said the neighbour-at-intervals, ignoring the thanks.

"I'd be glad—if you haven't any disliking to such—that you'd take care of my parrot for me. She's lonesome when she's nobody to talk to."

Grace's eyes glistened with a quick pleasure,—something childlike in it, of pure delight, as well as warm readiness of womanly gratitude. A parrot had been to her childhood a thing of bright, fairylike mystery. To have it there, among her flowers,—to hear its half-human chatter,—to teach it some new phrases,—to stroke its gold-green plumage, and feed it from her fingers, as she had watched her friend do,—why, it would be a joy, and she said so.

"Then I'll bring it over."

But, coming back, cage in hand, he met Mrs Hopeley herself, with basket and brown paper parcel.

"Good morning, Mr ——?"

"Good morning, ma'am. I've brought my parrot for your daughter. She'll keep it for me, she says, if you've no objection. I'm going away."

"Look here, sir!" cried the over-aggrieved woman, bursting forth. "I guess we don't understand one another clear. She ain't my daughter."

"For Miss Grace, then," said the strange man, with a sort of difficulty, but never caring a whit as to Grace who. No interchange of facts to be looked for here.

Mrs Hopeley sighed a loud sigh of impatience.

"Oh dear! it was bad enough before, but this is getting to be like the house that Jack built."

"If it's any trouble"—— began the neighbour, quite abashed.

"Lor, no, it ain't the parrot. Not the least in the world. But I'm bound to say I've been put to great inconveniences along of you, and to such roundabouts as is very tiresome. The opposite gentleman was bad enough, but the opposite gentleman's parrot, and all that, why, you see, it grows bigger. And the kinder you are, the more so. And, moreover, after you're gone away, it can't be the opposite gentleman withal. It's the want of the name, sir. You couldn't so much as get the good of a tin dipper without one."

A half smile showed a glimpse of the man's white teeth, while a shade, at the same instant, seemed to flit over the eyes.

"My name's never been a very lucky one," he said. "The bird's name's Poll. Won't that do? And as to the rest of it, I shall be 'opposite' enough. I'm going to China."

He put the bright ring of the cage into Grace's hand as he spoke, and turned off. Before Mrs Hopeley could find her next words, he was striding down the street, and had mixed himself and disappeared in the busy, crowded, shifting line of pedestrians that streamed up and down, to and from a great centre of labour and trade.

He could not forget that a dozen years ago, the name of Edward Blackmere had been put in capitals, and cried through these very streets, as the name of a man "arrested for the brutal murder of his wife."

CHAPTER XIII.

OPPOSITE AGAIN, AT THE LESSER DISTANCE.

A YOUNG lady in a crape bonnet and veil at Mrs Hopeley's door. A pleasant voice at the stair-head welcoming her as the door was opened by the cheery widow, and the comer put aside the folds from her face, and entered. It was Sarah Gair, come for her "bit of brown bread."

One year ago there had been a little paragraph in the Selpert papers about "one of our most respected citizens." It had been headed "Sudden Death." Jane Gair was a widow.

A widow with less of worldly fortune than she was allowed to know; for Mr Gair's property, like that of many a man stricken suddenly down in the midst of business risks and complications, had dwindled in the "settling;" and Jane, a confirmed nervous invalid, to whom quiet of mind was vitally essential, was simply to be waited on and provided for, not burdened with any care or doubt. Reuben Gair's confidential friend and lawyer, consulting only with her young daughter, and making smooth and comfortable reports to the widow when she was able to attend, managed everything.

There had been two or three unfavourable years ; there had been failures, and bad debts, and losses at sea ; Mr Gair's death had happened, or resulted, at one of those critical points of a mercantile history when life and credit are everything, when the wheels of a great enterprise are in full and complicated revolution, and, continuing so, may work out safety ; but, stopping, there comes ruin. Out of all the merchant's various assets, including twenty thousand dollars of his wife's inheritance, from the sale of real estate, which had been merged temporarily with his business risks, and smaller sums, invested with moneys of his own in certain high-paying shares, there was a bare nominal surplus when debts were paid. The house in Hill Street remained to them, but there was a heavy mortgage upon it, with only two years to run. A present home over their heads, and the interest of some fifteen thousand dollars remaining to Mrs Gair, was all.

Plainly, the only thing was to sell their house, pay off the mortgage, add the residue of the money to what they had, and go where they could live upon it. But this could not be done immediately. Mr Gair had died in the spring ; the summer was over before affairs were thoroughly made clear ; and the only way to avoid a dangerous shock to the widow was to make her health itself the pretext for removal.

"Next summer we can do it," said Say. "For the winter we must manage somehow."

Summer and winter made a year. Two-thirds of their dividends were absorbed by mortgage interest, and their capital diminished by the cost of their year's living.

And all this was a secret pain, an unshared dread and burden.

Sarah Gair came suddenly, in the midst of her bright youth, to know the grinding of that hardest kind of poverty which is not to be confessed and grappled with openly; but which gnaws in secret under a comfortable outside, demanding retrenchment as the sole salvation, when it is hard to see how an adequate retrenchment can begin. And Mrs Gair's whims, her invalid comforts, medical attendance, and nursing, were expensive.

It was well known in the city that "Gair had not left so much as was expected;" but nobody supposed them poor; "*she* had money," they said, and Say was proud; she would not even let the kind aunts at Hilbury know that a piece of the patrimony had melted away; they lived on; her mother must not be worried; and she bore what there was to bear, alone.

Her mother had her nurse, and lived in her own room; she did not know that there was only a girl hired for "general housework," to help Say in all the rest of the house; and that the delicacies she called for, at capricious hours, according to her uncertain appetite, were mostly prepared by Say's own hands, while she, perhaps, was fretting that she did not stay and read to her, or bring her work and sit where she could see her.

"She was all pain," she said, and possessed with restlessness. The very bed was full, it seemed to her, of misery, when she lay there. It had got into the pillows and blankets like a plague; it was associated with every hue and colour on the walls; with the folds of the cur-

tains and the pattern of the carpet. She had the furniture moved about, and changed, to break the fancy up; she was put into another room while her own was freshly papered. This had been done twice already since her husband's death. There were repetitions in the first designs that wearied her so; she had got the limit of the block, and knew just where the pattern began again, and the pain, she said, came in twinges with it.

This was Jane Gair at forty-six, who, at thirty, had been the fair, unworn, happy-tempered woman, who took all things easily, and for whom the world went smoothly round.

Spring had come round again; the early spring, whose balmy days of promise alternate with chill and storm. Mrs Gair alternated to better and worse with the weather. Say thought and planned; she could think of nothing but Hilbury, but she had only mentioned it once, and her mother had had a very bad day after it. "She never could go there, the high air of the hills would kill her; she wondered Say thought of such a thing. Couldn't they go abroad? She should be better when the warm weather came, and she would get away from this miserable New England climate altogether." Say sighed and could say no more. What ought she to do? The end must come sometime, and her mother must know; it would be worse then, for there would no longer be anything to save.

When she could get away for an hour she went for her "bit of brown bread." She had got an hour now.

The day was lovely, a jewel of warmth and sunshine set between bleak jaggednesses of March misery. Grace's

window was wide open ; there were crocuses, yellow and purple, in the long narrow box upon the ledge ; the parrot gyrated incessantly about her cage, clinging with clumsy beak and claw, and " picking her way " literally, with slow creep, up and down, and around ; chattering, like a saucy child, all the phrases that she knew ; whistling to the boys in the street, crying like the " thousand cats," comporting herself altogether with the utmost self-assertion and obstreperousness.

" My—good friend ! How dy'e do ? Thank you ! thank you ! Gone to China ! Welcome home ! What's your name ? What's your name ? " The last query had been wickedly put into the bird's mouth by the baffled Mrs Hopeley, greatly to the chagrin and trouble of Grace, who had striven in vain to make her drop and forget it.

Say sat down in the sunshine among the flowers. A look of rest came over her face ; a very sweet face it had grown to be, though a little of the old brightness was, somehow, gone. She had used to seem like nothing so much as a flower springing to a breeze ; there were such quick, little, graceful tossings of the well-poised head, such slight incessant motions of life and gladness, in which the fairness of feature and lovely colouring gleamed like that beauty of a wind-swayed blossom. Now there was a quietness, an endurance ; the patient look of womanhood with its burden on. Looking at this young creature, you felt that the first glow of youth, that mostly goes quickly enough, was already gone from her.

" I'm glad to get here, Grace. You don't know the comfort it is. How sunny you are to-day ! "

"Arn't we? It's sunny all down the street, to where the trees are budding, to make my summer 'view' again. Isn't it bright and sunny over the way? It's only at this time in the day that it ever really is; and the blinds are opened. He's coming back, Say!"

"How much you think of that strange friend of yours, Grace!"

"I haven't many friends, you know. And only to think of one that is a real friend, living anywhere on the earth, with a thought for me,—it's a great joy! I think it is a way God gives His own love to us."

"Just twice he has spoken to you. And then he went away, and has been gone a year. It's a queer friendship, Gracie!"

"It is just the friendship that does me the most good. I don't think I could quite bear having a very good friend near me all the time, like people who have been used to it. A little lasts me a great while; and I want my quiet thoughts about it. It's like those weeks at Hilbury. I don't think I could have borne much more. I wanted to run back here, to my little lonely nest, with the treasure I had got. I don't know what I shall ever do about heaven, Say!"

"I'm glad you've had Hilbury," said Say. "I knew Aunt Joanna would remember. I wish I could see her in her home. But I don't know when I shall ever get there now."

"It's as lovely as anything can be," said Grace. "And we had such busy work to make it! There was nearly everything to do; for there'd only been common tidiness

for years and years, nobody to really put a life into it till she came. And it kept smiling out so with every new thing and touch ; and yet the old home-expression stayed through all. It was 'the glorified body of the old home,' Mr Hartshorne said. Such a grand man and woman as they are ! They would glorify any place. And each of them thinks it is all the other ! I'm only puzzled to think how they endure such happiness, when it nearly broke my heart to stay and see it. It's well there are still places for such as I, who can't bear being too glad !"

"Grace !—Oh, Miss Gair, I beg your pardon. I forgot, indeed. My head's been so full of the spring cleaning, which is just the most muddling-up thing in the world, indubitably."

"Did you want me, Mrs Hopeley ?" asked Grace.

"It was only the old carpet. It's been shuck and brought in, and it's tore rather more than I looked for. I thought, if you weren't too busy, peradventure,—but I see you can't.

"Oh, Mrs Hopeley ! it isn't that I'm very busy ; but let it be till to-morrow, please. It's sure to rain, after this pleasant weather. And we must be in the window to-day, Polly and I, when our friend comes back. I'm sure it's all the getting home there is for him."

"You're sure of the most improbable sort of things, Grace Lowder, for evermore," said the widow, in her cheery way, coming over to the girl's side. "There's some bird in the air besides Polly that tells you stories, with neither a for nor a because to them. The carpet's nothing, to be sure ; it can wait as well as not, for a

rainy day, only—well, now! as true as I'm a living sinner!"

"Gone to China! Welcome home! Thank you, thank you! What's your name? What's your name?"

Edward Blackmere stood upon the step of Crossman's door. He looked up, giving a low familiar whistle, whereto the parrot responded with vociferation.

"Grace!" cried Say, shrinking back suddenly into her chair; "is that?" —

"That is my friend," said Grace, with simple, joyous warmth, her beaming face turned full toward him with a timid inclination of the head, to which he answered with a chivalrous lifting of his cap, and a flash of soft unused light in the dark upraised eyes. They were gray hairs he uncovered, saluting the young girl; but the instant happy look was new and young as hers.

Say, by a quick motion, let fall the folds of crape, to shield her side-face from the sunlight.

"And there," said Grace, still looking out, "is his friend, the gentleman."

Say glanced again, and saw that it was Gershom Vorse.

Nearly four years it had been since she had seen him. It gave her a quick, bewildering sensation, seeing him now, and in such manner,—like that which one has, at times, at sudden waking from a reverie, in which familiar things have been resolved to their ideal forms; in which one's actual surroundings have been the impalpable scenery of one's dream; when, with a flash, one starts to find them real and at hand.

From her inner life he had never been absent. She

had waited, with that strange patience that only women, and of women, perhaps, a few, not all, abide in ; putting by the hope that had never, indeed, been born ; nerved, on one side, by a human feminine indignation against weakness of sorrow ; feeling that she had been unjustly dealt with ; half-cured of her love, or the sting of it, by a tender contempt of the warp and prejudice that had wounded it, and that must sometime be done away ; of the soul that could so be narrowed by mistake ; a little of her reverence, which is the essence of pure womanly passion, gone from her thought of him whom she saw not nobly reverent and believing toward heaven and fellow-men ;—for a woman ever most warmly reveres, most nearly worships, the manhood that stands lowliest before God ;—yet looking always onward to something that, in the long history of their lives, here or in heaven, should surely come ; knowing that they were not done with each other until God willed, and that the crooked should first be made straight, and that which she had prayed for she should be given to do.

A strange, still excitement stirred her, looking down upon him, herself unseen, unthought of,—claiming him, in her heart, from those neighbours who talked of him and guessed about him, not knowing even his name. This was his home, then ! This was his fixed separate life, and the place of it ! A pang came with that thought ; a jealousy of people who had to do with him, she being shut out,—of old Crossman, even, who opened the door to him, and to whom he nodded as he went in. He was set off suddenly into a strangerhood. He was wholly

gone away from her—from them all. Gone away utterly, though making for himself an abiding-place here in the same town, with the distance of only a few streets between them ; a distance he had never crossed to come to her.

A chill began to come over her, over her old feeling for him, close even upon the first, quick, warm tremble of surprise. She had not dreamed of this. She had thought of him on board his ship,—away in foreign lands,—at the farm in Hilbury ; the old memories had held their places, and the old scenes were haunted. But this new place,—these altered surroundings,—this strange, isolated, secret living ! It made a difference. It touched rudely upon the old charm. Place and association have curiously to do with human sentiments. Seeing him here, it was possible to see him in a new light, to discern more sharply that to which his character had grown. His very way of life, when it was a thing for him to choose, had become an embodied distrust. It was unworthy. Say felt a something widening between them that was worse than time, or distance, or mistake ; felt this with one side her nature, that recoiled from one side his, even when the old tenderness claimed him jealously, yearned over him, wrought itself into a very pain of unrest, seeing him so near again, and yet so far, far off !

Five minutes had gone by while she sat and thought these thoughts. And then Grace Lowder turned her happy face round on her, and saw nothing, only a tired, troubled look, a flush replacing the first paleness, and a restless shine in the eyes.

“ I ’ve been selfish ; tell me your worries.”

She turned wholly round as she spoke, and, reaching her hand along the wainscot, dropped herself off the little raised window-dais to Say's side.

"Tell me your worries, dear!"

"It's no use," said Say, with a piteous, half-absent impatience. "They can't be told; unless I could tell you all my life, and what makes them worries."

"All our lives we can't tell each other, if we would. Every one of us is a secret, after all. But the little bits we can tell, they are comforts between friends."

"I can't tell you the last ten minutes, Grace; and what has come to me, sitting here, beside you."

Come to her in her thoughts, of course, while Grace had selfishly kept her waiting; nothing else had come to her; no other possibility entered the little needlewoman's mind. So secret, truly, are our lives.

"Tell me just what you choose, dear. Tell me nothing if you like; but let me comfort you." So she petted and soothed her mutely, and stroked her like a tired child, holding down her head beside her, but not looking her any more in the face, till the tears came quietly into Say's restless eyes, and brought their sorrowful calm with them.

"I must go back to my mother," she said, and rose up, brushing the wet off her cheeks, and laying hold of the long crape veil to draw it down.

She felt as if she had cheated Grace of something that belonged to her. Of this knowledge that she could have given her. But then a bitter, unreasonable feeling came;—of what did Grace cheat her? What, rather, usurp from her,—sitting there in her window, among her

flowers, and making friends across the way? Seeing them come out and in,—him and Gershom,—while she must go and make no sign; she to whom they belonged, by the thought and knowledge of years, by the love of a life?

Gershom Vorse saw a figure, thick veiled, robed in black, come down the widow's step, and turn away quickly. An employer of the little seamstress, Blackmere's window friend, he thought, come to order more black bravery. "What a parade grief makes to hide itself behind! What a bother of stitches to sew up a heart-rent! If people really believed half they pretend to! Humph!" Mostly to himself,—the last syllable, only, aloud,—the cynic said this; and the black-robed figure passed on out of sight; the heart carried a thought of him in it,—a thought of pain,—as it had carried this many a year.

And no little bird flew by to tell him so.

CHAPTER XIV.

EBEN'S DISCOURSE.

SOME one had already rung, and was waiting, when Say came up the steps in Hill Street.

A tall, rough man, in a snuff-brown country suit, and a snuffier brown, stiff, felt hat, who made room for her as she came beside him, and eyed her curiously. Say had her latchkey; it would not do to call Honey unnecessarily to the door. She made her own entrance, and then turned round inquiringly.

Either for the act announcing herself at home, or from the putting back of her veil, giving him a better sight of her face, the stranger showed a sudden recognition. He thrust forth a hand, bare, and brown as everything else about him.

"'Tis Say! I'll be buttered," in a whisper, "if it ain't!"

"I'm not sure,—I don't know,"—hesitated Say, a little frightened, drawing back.

"Who I be? S'pose likely you don't. I didn't recognise you at the first go off. You're growed, 'n I'm altered, some. Look again, though, 'n I guess you'll fetch it!"

"Eben!"

"Ezer. That's it, pat as Yankee Doodle. Mother to home?"

"Come in, Eben. Mother's at home; but she never sees company. She's very feeble."

"Sho! Used to be hearty enough. Guess she'll see me though, when you tell her. Say I've come clear from Illinois, round by way o' Hilbury. That'll fetch her."

Say's eyes opened wide at the man's manner. She ushered him in with dignity.

"I'll tell her," she said, in a tone that set aside further discussion and explanation.

She returned, after some minutes, with the same quiet, unmoved air, to say to him, without apparent admission of anything to be wondered at, that which did, secretly, most profoundly astonish herself.

"Mother will see you, up-stairs, in about half an hour."

"Whew!" Eben whistled. "Folks don't think much o' half hours, more'n o' half dollars, here'n the city, 't seems!"

Say took no notice. If he had come differently, she would have had a hundred things to say to Eben, associated as he was with her childish remembrances and pleasures—to ask of Huldah, and of their western home. It was not pride or forgetfulness; but it was the confident assertion of this man's presence here, after such an interval of years; it was the almost insult with which he seemed to imply that her mother would have no choice but to see him at his demand—her mother, who saw nobody, whom nobody ventured for a moment to disturb. It was a dark significance behind all this, which touched

quietly, the anger only in face and motion. The woman was half controlled, half self-betrayed.

"No, you don't. You didn't say that quick enough. An' I wouldn't talk any more, jest now. 'Taint good for you. I guess the best thing you could do would be to go to Hilbury, by me by. You might get hold o' sunthin' there to your advantage,—besides country air."

"Is that all you have to say?" It was an effort at dignity; but the cowering of the soul trembled in the tones.

"Yes, marn. Head an' tail, an' application. Meetin's out." He rose, and buttoned up the snuff-brown coat, and stood, twirling by the rim the snuff-brown hat.

"It is nothing to me. You are either crazy or mistaken."

"Come, now! That air won't do!" said Eben, with the same drawl of imperturbability that he had all along maintained, seating himself again, with arms across his knees, twirling the hat between them in his hands; his head leaned forward, and his face turned, confidentially, towards Mrs Gair.

"I've either told you the livin' truth, yer know, an' your conscience says the same; or else I've sarced you within an inch o' your life, an' that air bell's ben rung, an' I'm bein' turned out on the sidewalk, which don't appear. Now, yer see, I might ha' begun at t'other end, and worked it back to you, which mightn't ha' ben pleasant; but I thought I'd take it reg'lar, and begin at the beginnin'. Mebbe 'twas a mistake, though. It's hard to ravel a stockin' the same way 'twas knit. Old Parson Fairbrother kep' a journal," he went on, meditatively,

twirling the hat, and taking his eyes away from Jane to fix them thoughtfully on the carpet between his feet, "with some view to the chance of a me-more. An' them kind o' journals is allers full o' reflections. I don't s'pose he did nothin' athout moralisin' over it,—sunthin' in this fashion, likers not. 'June 27, 18—. Advised an' strengthened Brother G—— in a just act. Set my hand to it with him. By the promptin' o' the Lord, the widder an' the fatherless are pervided for.' 'N so on. It's an improvin' thing to look it over, seem't the me-more ain't writ yet, nor like to be. An' Parson King, he's got it. I don't mind lettin' out that much," raising his head, and glancing quickly at Jane's face. "'Tain't stirred yet; but there's where the light's ben throwed. An' the nex' thing's another rummage. Bindin' on you, an' me, an' Huldy. 'Cause *we* know that that air paper that's never come to light, had the parson's name to it, as well as Huldy's an' mine. An' then, whatever 'twas, 'twas hid away in the old cubbard, for a while at least. You, an' I, an' Huldy knows that. Or else, what was it waitin' unlocked and open for, that night, yer see? An' the Doctor allers kep' his keys, an' nobody meddled with his things or places, as Mrs Vorse said that day when you was up there lookin'. Priscill' heerd it, an' she named it to Huldy; she thinks it's a chance ef 'twas ever opened agin from then to the day of his death. 'Twarnt a large family, and there warnt many comers and goers, an' it's easy askin'. I've got that fur; it's a tollable strong thread, and the toe's started; I guess 't'll ravel when we once begin!"

The long speech had given Mrs Gair time to think,—

to collect herself. It is not impossible that Eben's shrewdness went far enough to intend this.

He had begun to ravel. Her only alternative was to help. It was no policy for her now to wait, to let things take their course, to let them find what they could, or leave it undiscovered. The longer the delay, the greater the difficulty, the further she would be implicated in the investigation, the more closely circumstances would be recalled and weighed; everybody would come to know that she had been "up and round" that miserable night; everybody would know that she alone had had access since to the place where the will had been found, and the missing paper had undoubtedly been laid away. None of these things would do.

She was quite calm, and ready with wise answer, when Eben finished speaking.

"You are altogether mistaken," she replied; "you have come here taking a wrong tone—an utterly unjustifiable one. If there is any written evidence of my father's wishes which has not come to light, no one can be more interested than I to find it, and follow it out. I shall be in Hilbury this summer, it has been advised. I shall do what I can, acting upon your statement, provided, that is, that you refrain in future from such intimations as you have made to-day. They would only put a complete stop to any efforts on my part; I should owe it to my own self-respect to remain passive."

A very fair and clever position this that Jane Gair took; she actually felt it genuine for the moment. People have two sets of attitudes that they stand in. There was

quite another grown familiar to her that she should cower into presently, confronted only with truth and her own soul.

"I'm agreeable," returned Eben, with the same undisturbed equanimity. "It's as good a way o' puttin' it as any other, 's fur 's I'm concerned. We understand one another, an' that's the main thing."

Mrs Gair passed over the under-significance of this.

"I must say, however," she resumed, "that it seems rather strange to me that you should rouse up on this matter again at this late day; you have let it wait your convenience, it seems. We had every reason to suppose that all possible search had been made at the time you first mentioned it, and that you, as well as we, were convinced that it had been a mistake."

"No, marm, I never was convinced; but I couldn't help it. I was a poor man out there in the prairies, an' no great hand at a pen, an' no way o' gittin' at circumstances, or provin' what I thought I knew. But I knew 'twas bindin', solemn, on me to fetch it sometime; or else, what's a witness fur? Folks that makes nothin' o' signin' their names every day o' their lives to they don't know what, mayn't feel it so; but when I put 'Ebenezer Hatch' to that air dockyment, I made it a business o' mine, afore the Lord, to see it through ef I could. 'Tis had to lay by: I've been hendered; but I hain't lost sight of it, never. An', in consequence, here we are, Mrs Gair."

"And your own legacy—your five hundred dollars, Mr Hatch; you have thought of that, perhaps, and how it might stand affected?"

"Yes, marm. The fust five hundred I made, arter I cleared my farm an' begun to realise sunthin', I laid by in Graysonville Bank, and there it lays, int'rest an' all. I've ben ready fer a reckonin' any time this ten year."

Say came in with her mother's dinner-tray,—a delicately broiled partridge, and a glass of warm liquid wine-jelly, just made, translucent as amber, to be eaten and sipped with such appetite as might be.

Eben Hatch took his departure.

"'Twas sharp an' sudden on her, an' thunderin' sarcy, no mistake! But there warn't no other way," he said to himself, walking down Hill Street with his hands in his pockets. "It's laid hard on me, too! 'Twarn't fer nothin' that the hendrances was took away. Will! a feller can't allers fetch everything in this world!"

Three little broken threads of life, ended in three small graves, were in the honest fellow's thought. Great drops stood in his eyes, with which the March wind had nothing to do.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS GAIR MAKES UP HER MIND TO BE EQUAL TO IT.

Was this Jane Gair's punishment, come suddenly? Her sin, and its defeat, bearing down on her at once,—force closing in around her, and compelling her to restitution, now that this Yankee honesty was on her track?

Her punishment had been upon her for long years. She had laid away a thing that she would not look at in her soul; but it festered. She had been restless with she knew not what goading; ashamed and afraid with a secret torment and terror; undecided with a hesitancy that unhinged her nerves, and sent a trembling of pain into every one, till it fastened itself upon her, so, and made her the helpless, diseased, unhappy thing she had become. She had had hypochondriac fancies; she had wondered, lying by her husband's side, whether she ever talked in her sleep. She had been afraid she might sometime have a fever, and, in delirium, go over again and betray her knowledge and her deed. She had had her repentances—moments when God came near her in some way, and His truth admonished her—when she had almost resolved *to go and find this thing out*. She had even tried once; when Say lay ill,—dying, she thought,—at Hilbury, she

had one day climbed again to this old cupboard, making errand of some grandmother's recipe that might be there. The letter-case was gone; it had been taken away, and put elsewhere; she dared not ask for it. Say got better, and her purpose was put by.

The husband of her youth had died; she had been smitten with the separate sorrow of widowhood. They had come to her with words of comfort, of faith in a continued spiritual companionship. She had shuddered. She would rather think of him who had truly had the love of her life, as gone utterly, than that he should look upon her now to know her soul; for he had been an honest man.

She shrank from her young pure daughter. She thought of the time that might come when she should not dare to die without confessing to this child, and leaving reparation in her hands. She was afraid of the conscience-weakness that might overbear her. This was her other attitude, before her secret soul and the truth of heaven.

"I will repay, saith the Lord." And verily, He doth repay. It was hardly strange that now, after the first startle of Eben's unscrupulous attack, her predominant feeling should be that of absolute relief. She might openly make search again,—she must. That question was decided for her. She might—she must—assist in the general endeavour to make clear this doubt, newly arisen,—the load was to be thrown from her conscience,—things had worked for the best, after all, and she had managed Eben shrewdly. For the money, what did she care for it now? Full of pain and discomfort, her life

circumscribed by a sick-room, lonely, disappointed of all she had so striven for. She might as well be honest as not, and lie down in her grave with a clear conscience! But this was all in the fine-soul type. She only confessed to herself that she was quite satisfied with the turn things were taking, and thankful. She had never felt quite easy about the will,—she would be glad to have justice done; if that paper still existed, she would do her utmost now to help the finding of it.

And so she greatly astonished Say, a few days after Eben's visit, by declaring that she had made up her mind, when the warm weather should have fairly come, to try Hilbury again.

Weeks hence she would do justice,—justice that a word—one self-humiliating word—might do to-day. Weeks hence—and she a feeble, pain-stricken woman, who could not count upon the strength of an hour!

Say wrote to Hilbury, and the days of spring wore on, and softened into early summer.

Mrs Gair seemed wonderfully better for the time; so much so, that Mr Brinley, the lawyer, judged it best, at last, to say something to prepare her for the necessity of permanently altered plans.

He approached his subject cautiously.

"You must find this neighbourhood grown very noisy for an invalid, Mrs Gair. Lower down, I see they are already converting dwelling-houses into stores. The tide will creep up here at last. Has it ever occurred to you that you might sell to advantage, and find a quieter home?"

"I'm not equal to having anything occur to me, Mr Brinley," the widow replied, with a feeble surprise and petulance. "Don't put anything in my head, for I can't bear it."

"It is difficult for me to judge how to act," said the gentleman, with a slight annoyance. "I must think for your interest. And if you could only bear a little business, it might be greatly better for you in the end."

"I don't care for business. All I want is my room, and my nurse, and the little bits I need, and not to be worried."

"You are much stronger than you were, I think?"

"I'm better able to bear being alive, that's all."

"No doubt the country air will do great things for you. Mrs Gair, don't you think you might be better to make your home in the country altogether?"

"My gracious! Mr Brinley, what can you be thinking of?"

"I'm thinking," he replied, driven desperate, and feeling that his duty must be done, "that your income would go further, so; and this house, well—the fact is, Mrs Gair, it isn't wholly unencumbered, you know."

Mrs Gair sat upright, the invalid air and tone displaced by an angry surprise.

"My husband's will directed that the old mortgage should be paid off, and the property secured to me for my life."

"Just so; but, my dear lady, it couldn't be done, not from *his* property."

Mr Brinley put his right leg over his left knee, and

gently wagged his foot from the ankle. This was the extreme of outward agitation he ever allowed himself in.

"Do you mean to tell me?" —

"I mean to tell you only what you can safely bear to hear; but it would be best if you could bear the whole."

"I will hear the whole! Mr Brinley, you have not used me well! How much have you been keeping back?"

Jane Gair spoke with strong, quick, indignant determination. For the instant, she was galvanised to a full strength.

Mr Brinley was a bachelor. He did not know much about women, and he was quite misled; thankful, also, to have this at last demanded of him.

"My dear Mrs Gair, you have been very ill, and there was no need to trouble you before. Now, the question comes up, and it becomes my duty to advise you to part with this estate, and to make some other plan as to your future residence. In this connexion, it is my unpleasant duty also to say that you will have little beyond your own property to depend upon."

"I don't believe it! Only forty" — "thousand dollars!" she was going to say. A hard thing even this for a woman to come suddenly to know, who had believed herself possessed at least of five times that amount.

"We will leave particulars till another time, my dear madam," said Mr Brinley, interrupting her.

He did not dare to tell the whole even now—to announce to her how even her own inheritance had dwindled down.

Jane Gair did not dare to hear. She turned suddenly pale about the lips ; there was no colour elsewhere in her poor face to fade. She fell back, trembling, against her chair. Mr Brinley brought her hastily some water, and rang the bell. The nurse came in, looking forked lightnings. The lawyer took himself, disconcertedly, off.

After-questions, upon an after-day, he dodged, as only a lawyer can.

“ Transfer of stocks—rise in values—hopes to realise—impossible to say, just now, how everything might turn out—do all that was practicable for her advantage—let her know from time to time,” &c., &c.

Somehow he kept her quiet, partly because of her own weak fear to face the truth.

But the paper?—the justice she was to help to do?

The secret conflicting agony began again.

She began to hope—to think—sometimes, again, that the writing never would be found. They would all search. There should be “another rummage,” as Eben had said ; but it might end as the first had done. Could she help that? She meant, Would it appear that she could have helped it?

Eben might do his worst. What then? She had gone down-stairs one night seventeen years ago, to get for Say a glass of water. She remembered it well. She had opened the old cupboard once, and hunted out a hidden volume there that she had wanted. Very well. What could anybody make of it? She had never touched the paper,—that she knew of. If there were anything there in the old case that had not been discovered, it had been

none of her hiding. It might come to light as soon or as late as ever it pleased.

As *what* pleased?

A vague thought of something—not blind, unconscious ruling among earthly happenings—struck athwart her inner sense with a shudder. She dared not look that way.

She wished she had never promised to go to Hilbury at all. It was a horribly nervous business. She began to feel herself worse. She blamed Say for taking her so quickly at her word. She knew—they all knew—that the mountain air was like death to her. Well, they might finish her up among them, and that would be the end. Say would have had her own way, and would be satisfied, perhaps.

Through such pain as this Say had to struggle, doing bravely with all her little strength what she knew was truly best for her sick, wearying, reproachful mother.

And the June days came.

CHAPTER XVI.

TO-MORROW.

I MUST stop here, to tell you a little more exactly how the old house at Hilbury was built. I don't like, myself, to get lost among imaginary architecture, which won't stay placed, and which perpetually violates the unities. I like to have things clear before me, mentally.

The farmhouse had an extended front, divided midway by the entrance passage and staircase you have heard of. Below, on one side, was one large room, of sufficiently generous proportions to hold comfortably any possible New England thanksgiving family-party, and all its merriment. On the other side, occupying the front, was the parlour, behind which the Doctor's study and certain closets intervened between it and the spacious kitchen. Something of this I told you long ago.

Up-stairs, there were two rooms on each side. On the left, opening from the stair-landing, and running from the kitchen-chamber to the front, the oblong "dimity"-room, where Jane and Say had slept seventeen years ago this very June; whence Jane had gone for the drink of water, and Say had listened, and heard the earthquake. Still to

the left, beyond, in the south-west corner, separated by a long narrow closet, and opening only into the kitchen-chamber, at the head of the "end staircase," was what had been Joanna's room, occupied now—for the sake of the same telegraph of sympathy from gable to gable of the two neighbouring homes—by Rebecca. On the right, the space was divided by a partitioning precisely at right angles with this last, the chambers corresponding to the situation of the rooms below. In front, with pleasant south-easterly aspect, that which had been the Doctor's, hung with chintz of buff and brown; behind, connected by a closet entrance, and opening also to the kitchen-chamber and the entry landing, the "red room," where Say had enjoyed and suffered. The long kitchen-chamber, with south-west end cut off, giving space for stairway, clothes-room, and Rebecca's old cheery bedroom, where the cherry tree came in, ran along the rear of all, occupying the remainder of the main building. Now you have it, I think, drawn out as a house should be, wherein you follow events of seventeen years.

When Jane arrived, at dusk, with her daughter, and her nurse, and her trunks, and her reclining chair, and her baths, in and upon a certain stage-coach from the Bridge, she was too tired to think, or choose, or say a word. It was not until Mrs Karcher was helping her into bed, and the buff-brown hangings were pushed back upon the side to give her entrance, that a sudden horrified recollection seized her, and an invisible force seemed to thrust her away.

To rest there! She saw a vision of white locks upon

the pillow, of dim, imploring eyes that met her own, of lips that moved with a mute signing—"There!"

"I can't!" she gasped out, and fell forward as she said so, her arms thrown out across the bed. Mrs Karcher just went round and took her by the shoulders, and turned her over, and drew her fairly on.

"The tantrums of her!" she ejaculated, finding her white, faint, and unheeding.

Rebecca came in.

Together they lifted her into a right position, and brought water and restoratives.

"Are you better, dear?" Rebecca asked, when the closed eyes re-opened.

"I don't know. Where am I? What did I do? Oh!" With a quick scream, she flung herself up to her elbow, out of their hands.

"I can't—I won't—it is cruel! What did you put me here for?"

"Don't you like it? We thought it was better. Mrs Karcher would be close by, in the red room; and the dimity bedroom is for Say. You would be all together. It seemed to be the only thing."

"And the cheer, and the tubs, and the bottles, and everything, just got out and put handy! And I without a foot to stand on!" The poor nurse spoke despairingly, in a low tone, to Miss Gayworthy.

"I think you must stay here to-night. You're not able to be moved."

"I am able! and I will not! Take me into the red room."

The white lips twitched. It might be worse to persist than to let her have her own way. They held her up, one at each side, and helped her slowly along, into the red room, and got her into bed.

The faintness passed off then, and the look of life came back. But with the life, came pain again; a fearful nervous agony in every limb. They stood over her, and bathed, and rubbed, and gave her soothing drops.

By and by she quieted, and, from pure exhaustion, fell asleep.

"Lord, save us from such another day!" sighed Mrs Karcher, wearily dragging herself off at last to her own uncertain rest.

Jane slept into the midnight.

Then she awoke, stark, staring; alone, in utter stillness.

To think.

To see the flicker of faint light through the closet doorway, from the night-lamp set upon the hearth in the room beyond.

To fancy the room in that sick glimmer, and the canopied bed; to find it impossible to picture Mrs Karcher there, its occupant; to be able to think of nothing but the white hair, the dim asking eyes, the tremulous moving lips; to fix her imagination helplessly upon these, till they drew her with a fearful magnetism of reality.

"Daughter!"

The very tone was in her ears.

She knew it was a fancy; but if she did not go and see, it would haunt and summon her, till she felt that she

should go wild. It was worse here, with that door open, with that sick-room gleam, and all else hid, than it would have been to stay there. She almost dreaded, in her overwrought excitement, that if she did not rise and go, her father's phantom shape would glide from the dim room, and come to her. She *should* go wild.

She was afraid she should scream out, and lose all self-control. She had been afraid of this sometimes before. She set her teeth, and clenched her hands. A strange shiver ran along her limbs.

She could lie there and endure no longer. At the risk of bringing back that horrible pain, she must get up, and go and see. She slid from under the bedclothes, and stood upon the floor. Noiselessly, lest Mrs Karcher,—she knew it was Mrs Karcher and no one else, she kept saying it over, yet she could not place her there, in the canopied bed in that next room; she could only see the old face, and the white hair, and the lips that whispered, "Daughter!"—lest Mrs Karcher should hear, and come to her, and put her back to bed again. And that threshold she must cross.

Was her mind going? Should she, if she once let go this clench of hands and teeth,—this clench of thought, that for years had held a thing it would not unclasp to look at,—go shrieking it all out together through the house—a madwoman?

It was almost upon her.

How the shadows flickered as the lamp flared in the breath through the doorway! They were like things alive.

Was this room full of guilt, haunting and mocking her, as the room at home had been of pain? Had it clung there to the very walls, the breath of her old unspoken deceit, to wait for her?

"Mrs Karcher!"

"The mercy!" The nurse sat bolt upright in bed.

"I must come to bed with you. I cannot stay alone. I'm nervous." The word came with a low tremble of horror, through teeth clenched again.

Mrs Karcher flung back the bedclothes, and the figure cowered and trembled in; laid itself, cold and rigid, at her side, as something might that should go wandering at midnight, and come back into a grave.

Mrs Karcher, providentially, was not nervous. She was kindly and patient; overworked and overtired, sometimes, as humans must be.

"We'll see to this to-morrow. Lie still, now, and go to sieep," she said, coming close, to give of her own abundant vital warmth, and rubbing the poor chilled hands.

"Yes, to-morrow. We will see to it to-morrow." There were separate thoughts in the two minds.

Jane Gair lay, growing calmer, outwardly, and thinking she would see to it all to-morrow. Borrowing a little peace, or stilling, a little, a great torment, so.

And the gray, easterly light began to creep up against the windows. To-morrow was almost come.

"Rub my hands again; they feel so strangely."

It seemed to Nurse Karcher that she had just done rubbing, and shut her eyes, when Jane said this an hour later.

"They're numb. I think they're gone asleep."

"You must have laid uncomfortable, and stopped the circulation."

"Rub! do rub!"

So she rubbed, and fell asleep rubbing; and Jane slept too, or some other stillness came over her.

It was broad day when the overtaxed nurse awoke. She raised herself very gently to look at her patient.

"Oh, my gracious God!"

There was life in the wide-open eyes; a terrible, agonised life; all else—limbs and features—lay dead. There was a look of striving; a helpless, inarticulate sound came from between the lips, where the tongue lolled incapable.

Mrs Karcher had seen it before; she knew it at first glance—paralysis.

Here, in the very spot where her old father had lain; where she had watched, with a hard purpose of not knowing what she would not know, his pleading eyes, his striving lips; here, where who knows what agony of late repentance had come to her, in these hours of fear, that she could never tell nor evidence now,—the hand of God was laid upon her.

She might live, and lie here days in this mortal nightmare; none could know. Brain and heart beat on alive, but she never should make utterance or motion more.

She must live so, and look out of those agonised eyes, whose beseeching none might answer, on the scene of her silent sin.

She must go out of the world, bearing with her, for her curse, the secret that struggled at the last within her, and

anguished to reveal itself; but that God, who had had long patience, now laid His finger on her lips, forbidding her to speak.

She had "done nothing." She had "waited." She must do nothing now. She must go away, and wait. It was her Retribution.

CHAPTER XVII.

SEEKING.

"I KNOW she *wanted* something," Say said, grievingly and repeatedly.

That last longing look—denied speech—from how many death-beds has it come up—to how many sorrowing hearts has it returned like a vision, haunting with something that was "wanted," and could never be asked for, or explained!

But this,—it had not been the look of a moment merely; of the last instant, when voice and motion fail, and the infinite yearning of all that is left unspoken surges up with the latest flash of soul-presence from under the fluttering lids. It had been an agony of days. It had painted itself upon Say's mental vision, displacing all other recollection of her mother's face. She could not think of her as she had been in health; she could not force her thought to picture her as she lay at last, stilled to the long sleep. Up, through the closed lid—the heaped-up grave, even—struggled that wild imploringness of wide-open conscious eyes. She could not think of her *at rest*. There are other hauntings, and more real, of the perturbed soul that goes unshriven, than the spectral wanderings of the old tales. The child knew that her mother had not gone to rest.

That a spirit-urging was upon herself; that a something had been left undone, which she, God guiding her, must do.

Every hard, reproachful thought—if she had ever harboured such, in her pain, in time past—of the unknown thing that had lain between her mother and Aunt Prue, whereof Aunt Prue had made such scathing charge, was gone,—changed utterly. She “knew her mother wanted something.” If she could have signed, or spoken! There was something she would have told to Say. If for a moment the child was left alone at her bedside, the yearning look, the terrible striving, the restless, imploring wander of the eyes, grew more intense—more fearfully earnest and agonising.

“It is something that you want of me?” she had said once, bending down, and speaking clear and low into her mother’s ear.

And the deep, searching answer that came back from eye to eye only! It was soul enjoining soul.

“I will think; I will try to learn; somehow, I shall be led; and if I find it, I will do as you would have me do!”

For a moment, then, there had been quiet; afterwards sudden, pleading lights of inquiry came up momentarily, from time to time, when Say leaned over her, as if the eyes said, “Will you?” “You are *sure* you will?”

Say knew, with a sweet, filial, pious certainty, that her mother had meant justly at the last. She only pitied, now, and longed to fulfil for her. She laid away what might have been a reproach and a bitterness; it was never to be looked at again. Her poor, suffering, stricken, regretful mother! This was how she thought of her.

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you.

from inside out." He began at Jane's conscience. He had got just fact enough to press upon that, and stir its office. Unless she would speak, he knew little and what he had known twelve years ago; "not enough to make a rumpus, an' upset a peaceable family."

He had kept his Yankee eyes and ears open in Hilbury; he had talked over old times; he had been especially interested about Parson Fairbrother; he had gathered odds and ends of hearsay and conjecture; he had discussed with the old neighbours the changes at the Gayworthy farm; he stirred up, cautiously, the died-out "wonderings" about the will; he had felt the whole atmosphere of the place, so far as it bore at all upon the subject which he had at heart. At his suggestion, Huldah and Priscilla had had confidences, and Priscilla had "named" the matter of her old surprise and curiosity; and her eyes had grown round again, with a fresh and a greater wonder; and the new impression that was to come, came at last, and mated itself to the old, that had been set away on purpose all these years to cool and wait.

Eben was convinced in his own mind. He "knew ther hed ben a bob to that air kite-tail; he'n Huldah felt convicted of it." And then there were the "reflections" in the Parson's diary. But to own the whole truth of Eben, he had got at these last in a somewhat surreptitious way himself.

He had taken Huldah down to Winthorpe, one day, when he had known that Parson King and his wife were away at an ordination. They had found Malviny Fair-

brother there; the old lady was dead; and Malviny "made it her home," now, at Winthorpe Parsonage. Huldah had set her going upon old times; Eben had picked up this bright idea of some possible existing record of what he wanted to know, and worked dexterously round to it.

"He was a dreadful orderly man, yer father; allers did everything, 't seemed ter me, 's if 'twas out 'v a book or goin' inter one. 'N, by the way, they say in Hilbury, ther was to 'a ben a me-more, or sunthin'. Oughter ben. What's the use 'v a man livin' a me-more, ef it don't git writ? Didn't Parson King hev s'm papers 'r sunthin' 't one time?"

"He had my father's diary," replied the minister's daughter, with prim dignity. She had been the "minister's daughter" all her life, from the days of grown-up tea-parties, where she appeared on privilege, till now. The sense of it had been ever present to her—a most sustaining sense; and fortunately, since there had been little likelihood of her ever merging this in any other claim or dignity.

"And he has it to this day. Laid away in his desk, I guess; which is all that will ever come of it, most probably. My uncle Gordon isn't exactly a *doing* man.' And Miss Malviny sniffed as one vitally aggrieved by such incompetency.

"'T must be very curious 'n improvin'," said the surly Eben. "I dursay now, 't had half the hist'ry 'v the town in it 's fur 's it went. Must 'a ben a sightly vollum!"

They were sitting in Gordon King's study at the mo-

ment, it being back parlour as well. Eben's eyes ran over the shelves, and rested on the minister's desk.

Miss Malviny got up, presently, and opened it. She took thence an old-fashioned sheep-skin covered book, of royal octavo size, with DIARY in large lettering across the back.

"This is it," she said, and turned it in her hands with pride.

"An' all full!" ejaculated Eben, with surprise. "I——! No, I don't, nuther. 'Twouldn't be proper. I dare-say, Huldy, that air's got sunthin' 'bout you 'n me in it, 'mongst other things. October the 19th, 18—, hey? Good many things might be proved out 'v a book like that, if there warn't no other way, mebbe!"

"18—." Miss Malviny ran over the leaves in her prim deliberate way. "Would it be a gratification to you to look at it?" And she held it out.

Eben put his hat down on the floor, and took the volume on his knees open as she gave it to him.

Huldah moved toward the window, and fell to admiring the great pink-flowered oleander that stood there in the sunshine. The two women's heads were turned away in conference over the plant, Miss Fairbrother's especial boast. Somehow, by one of his clumsy motions, Eben lost the place, and had but just recovered it when, after some minutes' talk, they turned round again.

"Here 'tis, Huldy, sure enough! No gettin' away from it!" And he pointed out with exultation, as she came to his side, the paragraph referring to the solemnisation of their nuptials

"Aint you 'horry' yet?" he whispered.

Miss Malviny turned considerably and sensitively away again.

"An' t'other's there, too!" he got time to add, in a still lower and more emphatic whisper, as he shut the book, and rose to give it back.

Miss Malviny took it, in bulk, with an air of pride, utterly unconscious of details. She was proud of it in bulk; she thought it ought, somehow, to be turned into a memoir; she had never taken the trouble to examine it in its particulars.

Another most safe, though slight concealment, this family secret of the Gayworthys had found.

Yet, after all, if it were known, what did it prove? That there had been a paper. Eben could prove that already. Something more. That the paper had been an act in favour of "the widow and the fatherless." But what then? They had searched for this paper before, twelve years ago, in the first handling of the Doctor's affairs, while all such things had been scrupulously kept together, and it could not be found; the same hand which prepared might have cancelled it. There had been, to many minds, sufficient cause. He could not say that he had not, at one time, thought it possible himself. The only lips that could, perhaps, have told the truth, were shut for ever. He had "almost fetched it," he had said to himself, when he had laid this hold, by sudden assault, upon Jane Gair's conscience. But she had died and made no sign. It was not an easy or a reasonable thing to

"upset a family" upon no better grounds. And Eben could not walk into the Gayworthy presses and cupboards with the search-warrant only of his honest persuasion and purpose. There are little every-day proprieties of observance that make the firmest persuasion, the honestest purpose, unavailing against their petty bars.

"She wanted something."

"No doubt she did want sunthin'," Eben replied to Say's eager appeal. "Dyin' folks mostly do. It's a kinder 'v an awful spell, when everything comes up together, and they ain't no time nor strength to say it with. But she never said nothin' to me."

"What did *you* say to *her*, Eben, that day when you came to see her in Hill Street?"

Say's eyes were turned on Eben's face, with hardly less of fearful earnestness in them than those other eyes had held, when they turned on hers.

"Don't look at a feller so!" he cried, fairly startled. "I couldn't tell a thing ef I did know it."

"What did you say to her?" Say repeated lower, and more quietly; still with an earnest demanding look in her eyes, though she tried to soften them. But it was as if another soul questioned through hers, and would be answered.

"Well—I told her I thought we'd oughter hev another rummage!"

"Rummage! Where? What for?"

"Round ginerally. Arter that air kite-bob."

"Eben! What do you mean?"

"Are you in earnest, Sarah?"

"In soul earnest!" said the girl. And the words shone in her eyes.

"Well, then, I'll tell you ev'ry pesky thing I know about it! That is—hum!—in proper order. Fust thing—there was a paper; the Doctor writ it, 'n me 'n Huldry signed it for him. Parson Fairbrother signed it too, atop. I never see nothin' of it but the names. But I knew then it was a bob!"

"O Eben! don't make fun! Talk plain!"

"Don't make no difference what you call it. A piecin' out, or a tail-end, to sunthin' that was writ afore, an' found arterwards, an' gone upon; an' this never was!"

"Did it have to do with grandfather's will, Eben? Is that what you mean?"

"That's what I'm persuaded on, though I never witnessed nothin' but the name. I wouldn't do no sech a blindfold job ag'in, though! It's a scary thing enough to be a witness; 'n ter feel that, go where you will, all over the world, yer've got to turn up again, simultaneous with that air paper, or mebbe a hull posterity's in a snarl, athout hevin' it ter conjer out, besides! It's my belief—'n I'm backed up in it strong, though that ain't needful ter go inter now—that that air hed ter dew with the property, 'n the widder, 'n the fatherless. I writ t'yer mother in the time on't; an' there was a rummage, but nothin' come of it. 'Twant never found."

"Why did you write to my mother?"

"Well, 'cause, fust place, she was the oldest, 'n yer father was egzeckitur under the will; 'n cause if the old

Doctor ever talk't it over t' anybody, 'twas most likely t' her; an'—well—'cause I see her in 'n and out o' them rooms that night arter the paper was signed, an' I thought, if anybody could make a guess where 'twas put, an' lay hands on it, she could."

"What night?"

"Seventeen year ago; the June afore Huldý 'n me was merried; the night o' the strawberry frolic, when you got inter the pigs' pail!"

"The night I had a dreadful dream, and heard the earthquake!" said Say, thinking aloud, involuntarily. "And mother went down to get me a drink of water, Eben. I remember it all very well."

She said these last words very deliberately, looking him in the face as she spoke.

"Did she fetch it?" said Eben, carelessly.

"No. Her light went out, and she came back. I remember it all quite well."

Her voice took almost a defiant tone, but the quick blood leaped to her cheek. Was it resentment at the possible shadow of an ill thought in Eben's mind? Or was it a hotter flash, as she called to remembrance the old "earthquake," and the time, years after, when she heard it again; when her grandfather's will was found in the panel cupboard, and she had cried out in her surprise, and her mother had clenched her hand so cruelly? Whatever it was, she crushed the horrible intuition down, and would not question it.

"It was a *memore*-able night," remarked the man, sententially.

"Go on, Eben," said Say, in her calm, deliberate tones again. "That isn't all. Why did you think we ought to have another rummage?"

"Well, ther was light throwed on my mind. That's the part that ain't needful ter go inter now. Ef the paper ain't never found, 'twont do no good; an' ef 'tis, why, then, it wouldn't be the leastest mite o' conserquence! 'Twas only light throwed on my mind, 'n Huldys; that's all."

"You must tell me, Eben. I must have all the light there is. My mother was anxious about this, I know. It was in her last thoughts. Now it is my work for her sake. You must tell me."

"'Tmight be a satisfaction both ways, mebbe," said Eben, thoughtfully. "It's a kinder 'v a burden ter me; 'n you want it. Well, the fact is, Parson Fairbrother was a man that was livin' a me-more, 'n keepin' a diary, accordin'. Miss Malviny showed it to me. That was all fair 'n square, warn't it?"

"Of course, Eben! Don't stop!"

"I never see it but jest that once, 'n not fer more'n three minutes then; but the leaves came open, for all the world, 's the hymn-book does at meetin' sometimes, 't the very number 'n line! An' there it was. I koted it t' yer mother; 'n it stirred her up. 'June the 27th, 18—.— Advised an' strengthened Brother G—— in a just act. Set my hand to it with him. By the promptin' o' the Lord, the widder 'n the fatherless is pervided fur.' Now, yer've got the hull critter—horns, 'n huffs, 'n all!"

"I thank you, Eben. I shall never rest until that paper is found."

She said it very quietly; but all the emphasis that could have been laid upon the words would have added nothing to the still force of her air of resolution.

"Only it mayn't be anywers, yer know," said Eben, provisionally.

"I am glad you told me of the diary," she went on, disregarding his words. "I know now what was in my mother's mind, and how it came. I know what it was she wanted, and why."

With these words, she turned and walked away.

"Ef yer dew," said Eben, relieving his feelings to himself, as she moved out of hearing, "yer know what the old Nickerdemus hisself couldn't find out afore!"

It was a great comfort to know that the light "throwed" on Eben's mind had been a light to hers as well; that she came direct to Hilbury, intent upon this duty. No wonder her poor eyes were so restless, and eager, and distressed.

The child's heart put this pious fraud upon itself, and would discern no clearer—would glance no further back.

"I will do it *for* you, mother!" she cried out into the silence, while the quick tears sprang. And she seemed to see that quieting look again—calmed, yet pleading, as if the eyes said always, "*Will* you? You are *sure* you will?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FINDING.

"AUNT Bessie," said Say, suddenly, "I want you to tell me something about my grandfather's will."

After a little pause, "I stand in my mother's place now; I shall have some business and responsibility; I want to know just *where* I stand."

"It was a very simple will, Say, made many years before his death, and never altered. All he had, except this homestead, after some legacies were paid,—your Aunt Prue's, and Huldah's, and some others,—was divided equally among us. Aunt Prue had five thousand dollars; the homestead was to remain for the use of either or both of us, Joanna and me, so long as we should choose to continue here unmarried. Eventually, if you lived, it would come to you, Say."

"To me! How?"

"To you, unless there should be a grandson; to the eldest male heir; failing males, to the eldest female. It was a little bit of his old English feeling; he wanted to keep the old estate in the family."

"Aunt Prue had five thousand dollars! Was that all?"

"Yes; we wished to make it more, for the property

was far larger at the time of your grandfather's death than when the will had been made; but she would not receive it."

"And there was nothing for Gershom?"

"He was a very little boy when the will was made, and they had not come here then to live."

"But grandfather was so fond of him. Don't you think it strange he did not alter his will, and give him something afterwards?"

"I daresay he thought of it; but people put things off so, Say—greater things than wills. We urged him, and his mother both; but they would let us do nothing. Aunt Prue is very proud, and very blunt and honest, Say."

"And Gershom is, too; honest and proud to hardness."

"So there it ended; we could not force them to bear an unwilling obligation."

"But, Aunt Beesie, there *was* a paper talked of once, and searched for; there may be something yet that is waiting to be found."

"It was thoroughly sought for; it might have been nothing; and, at all events, we had to rest content. It could never be found."

"But, auntie, think of all the places where a little paper might be hid! And I believe it *was* something; Eben thought so, and he signed it. He wrote to mother; he wasn't easy, you know."

"How did you know all this, you were such a child?"

"People come to know things, somehow, when it's time;

and it's time now for me to know this. I am honest and proud, too, auntie. I should like to search, too ; it's my turn now."

"It seemed so likely, Say, that if my father had written and *kept* such a paper, it would have been found with the will ; and there was nothing there. It is very true that a small thing could be hidden away in many a common place ; but there are *likely* places to look in ; there are threads of probability to guide us, or we should be astray among wild possibilities always."

"It was in that old wallet ; I remember when they took it out."

"Yes, quite by itself in the small pocket. The large one was full of old letters, arranged by their dates, and tied ; it was all looked over."

"And the wallet was in the panel cupboard. Auntie, I should like to look that old cupboard over. Are the same things there ?"

"Mostly ; but it is quite useless, Say ; it has all been done before."

"I haven't done it ; and it's my turn now," persisted Say. "Just think of the old books ; it might be between the leaves of one ; or it might have slipped down into a crack. May I look anywhere I like ?"

"Yes, anywhere. I can see the uselessness ; but I can understand your feeling ; and I suppose we can never be too careful to be true," said Aunt Rebecca.

"And if I find a crack deep enough to hold anything, may I have Mr Chisler here to take down the boards ?"

Say spoke playfully ; but her heart was in her purpose

none the less. Aunt Bessie laughed, but she did not ridicule; the child should have her way, and her turn.

There came a rainy day among the hills in early August. People who live in cities think, perhaps, they know what a rainy day is,—a day when there will be no visitors, and the bell-wire has comparative rest,—when they can sit in wrappers if they like, and read books, or write letters, or do queer stormy-weather work that they would not bring out in the sunshine,—when the streets seem to them deserted, although there is yet the rattle of incessant carriages bearing people who must go, and cannot walk, and a continual bob of shiny umbrella-tops up before the parlour windows, they feel very safe and alone; nobody will come. But they know nothing of the utter quietude of a rainy day indoors among the hills, and of the *still noise* out, when the drops come down with their soft sweep and wish among the leaves and grass,—when nobody goes up and down the road,—when the oxen are all housed, and the farmers busy in their barns,—when the very chickens run under the fences and the brushpile, and only the ducks are abroad and gay,—when the piles of gray cloud hang against the mountain-sides, or shift about and break away, making all sorts of new geography of islands and promontories, where the cliffs and ridges rend them, and come through in patches—when new relays of vaporous hosts sweep up the windy horizon, and down the hither slopes like charging squadrons,—when earth lies passive in the clutch of the storm, and through all the wide heaven is the thronging and hurry and rush of the great elements at work.

The separation, the solitude, the grandeur, of a summer-day's tempest like this, is felt nowhere as in the hill-country.

The afternoon was wearing on. They had been all day sitting in Rebecca's room. The storm was well-nigh spent. The wind had lulled and the rain came down more gently, like the tears of a half-soothed child. The mist-robe lay torn and fluttering along the hills, wreathing itself in soft folds; and here and there, behind, some crest, bared momentarily, caught the coming gleam, and lay in a green golden light.

Say sat by the window, leaning her elbow on the sill; looking out, with a restlessness in her eyes, on the shifting cloud forms, and the fair, freshened fields, and the red gable, shiny-wet, down the hill, there, between which and this old house-corner had been such secret sympathy and thought-interchange of years.

Say *was* restless; like one possessed, as people sometimes say. Possessed with a thing that would not leave her quiet, until it should be accomplished at her hand. It had been upon her all these weeks.

Aunt Rebecca was anxious about her. She had grown thin. She had little appetite. She was always preoccupied. Her eyes searched into corners; went dreamily in wandering glances along the very floors, as if always looking vaguely for what was lost.

There was scarcely a book in the house that she had not run through with fluttering scrutiny. The panel cupboard had been ransacked; only its thorough old workmanship, wherein no crack had been left or started, saved it, ap-

parently, from impetuous demolition. She was determined that this thing she sought for should be somewhere. The thought of it was upon her always. She was secretly suspicious of carpets that had been up and down a dozen times. She would have liked to get behind wall paper, and pry away the very wainscot. It was like an insanity. Somewhere, in this old home, lay a long-buried secret; she would not be persuaded, for an instant, that it had utterly perished. Somewhere lay waiting this paper that she must find. She said little, but it was in her eyes, in her whole expression and bearing.

"You are growing morbid, Say, in this fancy of yours. It is almost a monomania."

"It is laid upon me to do. It presses harder every day. The more I fail, the more something seems continually to say to me, 'You must not give it up.' Aunt Rebecca, I cannot help it."

They exchanged these words, without preface, as Say sat there in the window, this rainy August afternoon.

Suddenly, Say started, and turned round.

"Aunt Bessie! You have never given me the old letter-case itself!"

"No, dear; because it is quite empty."

"I have looked in a great many empty places. I must look everywhere. I climbed the other day upon the table, and felt all along the dusty top of that old chest of drawers. I pulled the drawers out, and looked underneath and behind them. I have lifted the pictures from against the walls. I am always thinking of thin, narrow spaces, where a paper might be slipped and hid."

"Say, this is dreadful! Have you thought what this implies? Such a paper could be hid in no such place by *accident*."

"I cannot help it," Say repeated, feebly, like one powerless and driven on.

Rebecca rose, and moved toward a curious, tall, triangular cabinet, that stood in the corner of the room, between the fireplace and the door, leading out into the kitchen-chamber. She stood up on a chair, and put her hand over the top, behind the quaint carved moulding, and brought down a key.

With this she opened two small upper doors.

Say watched her eagerly. She had not asked for this, because she knew it was the one-sacred place which Aunt Rebecca kept to herself. Here were her letters from her dead brother, Ben, written when he was away from home, at Winthorpe school. Here were scores of little relics of the dear old past, whereof none but she knew the association. Her mother's little ornaments, that had fallen to her share, lay here. Here, also, she had put away the old, worn, yellow letters of courtship and friendship, that had been found in the faded, shapeless letter-case. This lay with them, folded into something of its first intended form, and tied about neatly with its ribbon-string. But it was empty. Aunt Rebecca was very precise; and its old, bulgy, untidy look had annoyed her, among the delicate order of all else.

She opened the drawer in which these things lay, and drew forth the wallet. Say sprang to her side.

"Don't open it, auntie! Let me!"

"Poor child! When will you give this over? You pain me, Say!"

"Don't mind me, auntie. If we can only find the truth!"

Then,—like some dumb creature that has found a thing its instinct treasures,—she turned away, and flitted to her corner with it.

Rebecca busied herself before the opened cabinet again. Suddenly, a cry.

The resistless propensity to think always of "thin, narrow spaces where a paper might be slipped and hid," seized instantly the possibility that lay here. At first sight of the frayed slit in the brocaded lining, it swooped upon the truth.

"How strange! how blind!" was her inward ejaculation, as a tumult of apprehension and certainty rushed over her, and an inarticulate cry escaped her lips, as her fingers sought nervously and touched upon—something at last!

A tremor took her. It was coming. This that she had longed for; that she had vowed to compass. The truth should come to light.

She dared not prove it suddenly,—recklessly. It was a thing to touch with a prayer. She gathered up the loosened folds, and sprang away to her own room with that one, quick cry,—round through the great kitchen-chamber to the dimity-bedroom, where she shut the door, and put the button over the latch, and went down by the bedside on her knees.

The old wallet lay open along the bed. Her head was

down an instant between her hands. She could not think in words. Her heart gave two great springs.

“O God! O my mother!”

Then she put her finger back into the opening. Her pure, honest, earnest touch fell where Jane’s had fallen last.

She drew the paper forth.

A tiny thing rolled with it on the white counterpane,—a little pin-point of light.

It flashed over the whole, long mystery, and made it clear,—horribly clear, to the instant apprehension of the child, bearing penance here for her mother’s old mute sin.

A recognition and a memory leaped, each to the other, striking fire of evidence.

This particle of precious crystal, the wonderful old ring her mother wore when Say had been a child, whose tiny gems were placed to spell a word; the empty setting at the end where a diamond had been lost out, ever so long ago, she remembered, one summer, when they had been at Hilbury. Cast aside ever since, and lying now in the little jewel-case that held her trinkets. Ruby, emerald, garnet, amethyst, ruby—the diamond atom gone.

That which keeps the delicate links safe in the dead rocks, whereby men spell the secrets of old cycles, takes care also of all minutest, marvellous, most precarious links whereby a knowledge is to come. Nothing is strange or difficult in this old world, written all over with frail records, yet unperishing, of life, and fate, and human deed.

There is nothing hidden but shall be made manifest when once the hour has come.

She could not rush to proclaim that she had found it. Fifteen minutes after, she lifted the button from the latch, threw back the door, sat down in a chair, and waited.

Rebecca came, pale and quiet. Say sat there, knowing that she would come. Her earnest eyes lifted themselves up and met Rebecca's face with a strange calm in them.

"Here it is," she said, the paper lying open upon her lap; her hands laid, or rather dropped passively, across it. "Send for Aunt Prue and Gershom, please."

She did not offer to give or show it. There was a singular still assumption in the young girl of the right and part she had in this family event and crisis.

"It concerns us all, Say, you know," said Aunt Rebecca, with a shade of rebuking expectation.

"Yes, auntie," returned Say, with a look that pleaded to have its pain, its unreasonableness even, borne with. "But them most, and me. It is between us first. It must be. There is no question with *you*. You are honest and true,—you and Aunt Joanna. Wait, just a little."

For the child's sake, sitting there with this strange spell upon her, Rebecca had patience; setting aside her own rightful and grave interest. There was a something, also, that she could not have disputed if she would. Something in the girl's air, strong and authorised; something in the very gravity of this disclosure that was impending. It was not a thing to be clutched at,—to be pounced upon. There is an instinct of decorous order, delaying impulse in the momentous arrivals of life.

Miss Gayworthy went down-stairs and gave a direction.

Gershom Vorse had been for the greater part of this interval of time, since the pleasant spring day when he and Blackmere had come home, at the hill farm with his mother. He had been up and down between Hilbury and the city, and a sea-shore town beyond, where a great ship was building that he was to command. But there had been long quiet weeks, such as he might not have again for years, that he had been spending with his mother. Blackmere had been here, too, for a while ; but he was like the great amphibia ; he could come up from the deep for a little to live and breathe on absolute dry land ; he could not stay long without a sniff of the salt sea. Gershom was here now by himself, with Cousin Wealthy and his mother.

Say had seen little of him ; that little under restraint of her great grief, as well as of all else that lay between the two. But the feeling of his neighbourhood had been a strong element in the force that had impelled and possessed her in all these weeks of one persistent thought.

If she could only do it now ! He might never come back again. He might never know.

It was done. It had come. It lay within her hand.

Three-quarters of an hour later, a covered waggon drove into the yard.

Rebecca had gone back to Say, after sending off her messenger to Wealthy's ; but she had not stayed. Say hardly heeded her coming in ; she was unlike herself ; she sat there saying nothing, apparently feeling nothing of

the pause that ordinarily seems almost to demand speech ; waiting only ; holding the refolded paper fast within her hand ; a pale resolve and expectation on her face. Rebecca would not watch ; she asked no further question ; she went away softly, presently, and waited also with an anxiety. She saw that there was something beyond the mere finding, and that the child would have her way.

"Send them into the little room, please," Say said, when Miss Gayworthy came round and looked in upon her before descending to meet Prudence Vorse and her son.

"Send." Rebecca was to wait a little yet even. Truly, "standing in her mother's place," the girl seemed suddenly to take the elder right upon her. The good lady was half-pained with a little natural human hurt and jealousy ; but she could not expostulate ; there was too real an earnestness upon the child. Let it be so. Let her still have her way. God grant this strange high tension of nerve and will may end in nothing worse !

The two, Gershom Vorse and his mother, were led into the little room.

"It is Say who wants you. Something has happened, I hardly know what ;" and very much surprised at their summons and reception, they waited there for the moment, while Miss Gayworthy left them, and before Say came in. They looked up, wonderingly, as the quiet figure entered and the pale still face confronted them. Say shut the door behind her, and the three stood there together by themselves.

There was nothing in this of preparation for effect, no

touch of dramatic climax ; it was the still earnestness of a hard, imperative necessity for doing,—taxing all power and resolve, and leaving no room for thought of what appeared, that gave intensity to the little scene, and caused it to shape itself.

“ I sent for you, Aunt Prue. I wanted to see you *here*. I have found something.” The voice came dry and changed, but her tones were very quiet.

“ Aunt Prue, Gershom, I am here in my mother’s place, to-day, to give you this.”

She held the paper out. Old, yellow, it almost bore its story on its face.

Prudence Vorse took it, and Say waited.

Aunt Prue was fifty-two years old. She drew her spectacles from her pocket, and put them on. Common-places come into everything.

She opened the folds mechanically ; and her eye went over the lines almost without surprise. Nothing could have so surprised, or seized such hold of her, as the look and tone, restrained and simple, yet earnest to such agony, of the girl who stood before her waiting—Jane Gair’s child.

What this thing imported to herself, dropped out of sight as she discerned it, in view of what it had imported to this other.

She took her glasses off when she had read ; she took off, with them, a look that Say had known her face by—a hard look of long years.

She reached the paper to her son, as a thing to be thought of presently now. She came straight over toward

where Say stood. She would have taken her by the hand.

"Not yet," cried the girl, with a sudden sharpness. Then, with one caught breath, she toned her voice to quietness again.

"That is not all. Aunt Prue, I am here for my mother. It must be *confessed*. It *was* a hiding, and—a lie. Aunt Prue, forgive me, for my mother!"

Then Prue took her in her honest arms. Never, even as a little child, had she held her so before. She *was* a Gay-worthy.

Gershom turned away a little; a red flush swept up over his face, and a great heart-throb swelled to his throat. There was no lying blood in her, after all.

But Say had not come here for a scene. She had never thought of herself, or of how they would take it. It had all been for her mother. She had finished her work, and she must go.

"It is all done now," she said, with a low, long sigh, as one might who had voluntarily and bravely borne some fearful pain, "I'm so thankful! Tell it to Aunt Rebecca."

And, almost before they were quite aware, before Gershom had recovered himself, and come to her with his outstretched hand, she had withdrawn herself, and gone, in the same still pale way that she had come.

Afterward, Rebecca found her lying on her bed, white, motionless, exhausted, peaceful; like one from whom a tormenting spirit had, at last, gone out.

Aunt Prue came up and kissed her, silently, before she

went. At this, two tears swelled up under the half-shut lids, and rolled down, softly, over the pure pale cheeks.

She took this, also, for her mother.

PERHAPS those drops of innocent, tender, loving pain, went somehow, in God's mercy, far to purge the sin-stain of a late-repentant soul.

All Hilbury came to know it soon; not the whole, but that this paper had been strangely found. All Hilbury wanted to know all it could; and what all Hilbury demanded and came to know, the reader has a claim for also.

This was the paper:—

“I hereby direct that, in the division and disposal, according to any will that I may leave, or otherwise, of whatever estate I may die possessed of, Prudence Vorse, child of my late wife, Rachel, by her former marriage, or her son, Gershom Vorse, inheriting after her, be counted and considered among my heirs, to take such share and privilege as would so fall to her, or to him through her, if she, the said Prudence Vorse, were child of my own body.

“This is my will, to the setting aside of anything that conflicts herewith, in any writing that I may before have made; but to the altering of nothing else, except that this is to take the place of any smaller bequest of mine of former date, to the said Prudence, hereby provided for; and I charge my heirs, and whomsoever into whose

hands this writing may fall, to see my will done in this thing.

“Signed, this night, June 27th, 18—

“BENJAMIN GAYWORTHY.

“In presence of

“FELIX FAIRBROTHER.

“HULDAH BROWN.

“EBENEZER HATCH.”

They were all honest people. They asked nothing of the law. Neither party concerned questioned for an instant “whether it would stand.” It was the plain will of him who had been gone from them so long, solemnly charged upon them all.

The Hartshornes, Miss Gayworthy, Sarah Gair,—they were to make this thing right.

But nobody, save Sarah Gair herself, knew what it was to be for her to do.

The sale of the house in Selport had been effected ; she had had letters from Mr Brindley, apprising her that she must come to town for the signing of necessary papers, and the final settlement of her affairs. Meanwhile she wrote, informing him fully of this new posture of things ; begging also that the business might be kept, for the present, carefully between her own knowledge and his.

Hilbury was greatly exercised. Eben and Huldah were under solemn promise to Say. It was thought to be pure accident or providence, the finding of the momentous writing so long concealed ; and it was turned over and over,

in small mouths and minds, as great marvels and providences are.

Eben and Huldah had their private comparison of impressions on "the strange way things had worked."

"A feller can't allers fetch a thing hisself," quoth the blunt farmer, "if he's a witness. But—it gets fetched!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THRUMS AGAIN.

MR BRINLEY knew better,—at least, man-fashion, dealing so with, and in the interest of, a young inexperienced woman, he thought he did. When Gershom Vorse, coming down to Selport, sought him out and questioned him, he let out, incontinently, all the cats Say thought she had so securely tied in his legal and executorial bag by the hard knots of confidence and honour. He humoured her in his reply, but he lifted his keen, practical eyebrows very high over her romance of self-beggary and magnificent restitution. All right, doubtless, in moral theory; but moral theory was not the only thing with him; far less, youthful quixotism of generosity. There was also common sense, which lay more in his line.

Here was a girl with fourteen thousand dollars; the sale of the house had given her three thousand above the mortgage; there had been eleven thousand beside, after paying all that had been incurred in their year's living and business expenses. All at once she finds herself to be one of three persons who are to make up to a fourth a withheld inheritance of thirty thousand,—everybody else concerned being amply able, she alone forced to render up nearly all her living. And this must be done quietly,

forsooth ; the friends kept ignorant of actual facts, till all should be securely accomplished !

Not so fast, Miss Gair ; Mr Brindley took the reins very quietly into his own hands.

“ How will this leave her ? ” — “ With just about enough to buy her three or four gowns and a bonnet, in a year ! ” returned the lawyer to Captain Vorse’s question.

“ And she knows this ? ”

“ Humph ! As women generally know such things. She’s on the high ropes of justice and magnanimities just now ; wants it to be done at once, and kept quiet ; the bonnets and gowns will come afterwards, somehow ! Women can’t calculate, especially girls. And of all girls, this one more particularly.”

This one ! Jane Gair’s child !

Gershom Vorse walked down to the railway station on the day when the Hilbury party was expected. They were all coming ; his mother, the Hartshornes, Rebecca, and Say. There had been a plan for coming down since early spring ; Jane’s arrival, illness, and death, had put it by ; now, there was all this business to do, and it might as well be all transacted together.

Captain Vorse had engaged comfortable rooms for them at a hotel ; he was to meet them on this Tuesday at the coming in of the northern train.

They were strange thoughts he had, sitting there in the waiting-room, those twenty minutes before the cars were due.

Were there a thought-photograph, it might take curious instantaneous views at these momentary meeting-points

of diverse and incongruous lives. For, after people have got their tickets, and have asked their questions, and counted up their railway wraps and parcels, and find ten minutes or so upon their hands, they do think queer thoughts about themselves and about each other.

There was a knot of Selport school-girls going five or six miles home to dinner by a branch train, presently; there came in with them all the atmosphere of school-chat and young egotism, ignoring all else in the great world but its small growing self. There were girls of a different social order going out of town to "places," with their bundles and tickets held in fast gripe; of these, the greater part to come back, with turned-up noses, by return trains; there being so few "first-class" opportunities, with hot and cold water conveniences, and adequate visiting and convivial privileges, in this line of life. There was a bride of three or four hours' making, very conscious and important in her fresh, delicate travelling dress, and lavender ribbons; there were hard solitary men on runs of business, with eyes, and noses, and chins all sharpened to the business point. There were friends to see off friends; and friends to see friends back again. There were innumerable babies. And trains were announced and departed; and people's thoughts were broken off short, and there was great gathering up of parcels and shawls at last minutes; and babies were taken by surprise, as the little miserables continually are, being shouldered again, just when they had settled comfortably in arms, or subsided, with no questions asked, just when the world around had begun to be vaguely in-

telligible and interesting from their temporary outlook. Tired mothers gave the last consolidating shake and twist, and papas came in in time to put on all the small bonnets upside down ; and, through all this, and much more, Gershom Vorse waited and thought one thought, over and over, out and out.

Seventeen years ago a thing had been hidden away ; a thing that concerned his worldly fortune, which, all this time, he had done without. All this time he had gone his way unwitting of it ; and the world, so, had taken a different turn with him for life.

Was it only this paper that had lain hidden ? Was it only worldly fortune that stood affected ? What other thing was this which had come to light with it, whereof he had been unknowing, unbelieving also, all these years ? What other possible gift of God that had been so withheld, or thrust away ?

The truth of a human soul that he would not see ; that a falsehood quite outside of it had blinded him to. The love of a human heart that had "grown up with him in it ;" that he had ignored and gone without, half-living ; that he would not take, when, for a moment, it lay before him ; that, crushing his own love down, he had wounded sorely, and crushed out also ; that shone now to his thought as something afar that he might never reach. He—the hard man of thirty, grown into the thing that he had willed himself, distrustful, unsatisfied ; "watching, carping, fault-finding ;" with but one love and one friendship to keep him human—his mother, and the man of harder life than his.

And now his very honour rose up, shoulder to shoulder with his love, that sprang, as it were, from out its grave where he had buried it.

His honour, his pride, that fumed helpless. She had him at his mercy. The foot of her nobleness was upon his neck. It was useless to resist, to say that he would have nothing of this money. It was not she alone who held it. Moreover, it was not his yet to reject.

They had no right, Prudence Vorse and her son, to refuse these other upright consciences a justice to themselves, to the memory of their father, the just man gone. There was something in the clear nature of the woman who would not take a strawberry unpaid for, and who would take her due to the value of a cent, which recognised the plain right, and demanded it, wherever it lay—the right to pay, no less than to receive a due. It was the concession, more generous often than a gift, which one honourable soul must make another.

So the strong man fought with his thoughts, waiting there, seated, regarding absently the life about him, or pacing restlessly the now-vacated platform, as the time came and passed when the train should have been there.

Fifteen minutes behind, then it came thundering in.

Instantly a crowd and a rush, and a shouting, and a hurling of luggage, all over the space where a moment before had been almost emptiness and stillness. In the confusion he held his place, watching; and, as the crowd resolved itself, they emerged from it at last, the little party that belonged to him—Gabriel Hartshorne, Joanna, Rebecca, Prudence, and Say.

There was a great hotel coach in waiting. There was a porter ready to take checks and transfer luggage. Gabriel took care of his wife and sister; Gershom had his mother and Say to his share. So they moved on, and went out together, after a very hurried greeting and grasp of hands. A minute, that had loomed up almost like a life to two thoughts there, had come, and was over—over, with scarcely a word, or other outward thing to mark it, as some of our intensest moments are. She had had her hand upon his arm; he had held her close, and she had clung in the crowd and tumult of an instant—that was all. They had been just like any other people, as Say had hoped, looking forward to this meeting with something of the old questioning and dread; they might be, as Gershom, with a strange new apprehension, was beginning to fear they must be.

“If he would only treat her and trust her now, as he did the rest!”

“If he had not been a fool, she might have been to him what the whole world, perhaps, did not hold for him now!”

The current of their two lives set together again for a while—neither could help that. Both were strangely and secretly glad. Both had felt this point of meeting from afar. Yet Gershom was writhing in his man’s pride, that felt itself stabbed, under this late stinging recognition of a thing better than legacy of land or money, lost to him, hidden away, put behind him with his own hand, for years, years that had settled all his cheerless life for him. And Say was hoping only to be treated like the rest at last, only

thinking of this one thing that remained to her to do, this act of restitution for her mother's sake, thinking that she should stand at last for a moment on the manifest level of this man that had despised her, side by side, and face to face with him, and then go contentedly her own way alone. She thought even that she had ceased to love him in these long hard years.

"There is one way to help it," said Gershom Vorse to his mother, when he had ended telling her all that Mr Brinley had made known.

"There is but one thing for you to do," said Prue, looking him straight in the eyes, "if you *can* do it as a man should, and not make it a worse thing than the other."

Into the eyes she searched there came a flash.

"You say it, mother?"

"I do say it," said Prudence Vorse, reading the certification of his life-story that she guessed, in that one quick gleam.

An hour after, Prue got the rest away. Gabriel and Joanna were easily sent off together, and she took Rebecca to her own room on a pretence, and kept her there with the truth; and Gershom Vorse and Sarah Gair were left together in the parlour appropriated to the use of this family party. Alone together, these two, who had not been so since the moment, five years since, when Say had given him the word—God's word—that had come to her in her pain, and they had parted.

Straight to her side, with a purpose in his face, the sailor came. She looked up as he stood beside her, and

all through her this outshining purpose of his quivered and thrilled.

"I've something to say to you," he said. It sounded short and abrupt, and he did not use her name. But there was a something, not quick and hard, but rather earnest and deep, in his tone, and that she caught, and it thrilled her the more.

"Before all this is done, it is more than this will of my grandfather's that you have brought to light. You've shown me yourself. There's more than money-justice to be done. I've wronged you, in my thinking of you, all my life. I've wronged you, and myself; because—I love you."

Dead silence. A flush, that came up from her heart, and sent great tears into her eyes, lit Say's face, and went away and left it pale again. But she could not, for the moment, speak a word.

"Is it any use—now?" asked the plain, blunt man, humbling himself so, from his hardness, with that pause and that "now."

She must answer something.

"Why have you said this—now?" she parodied, with a sudden bitterness of pain, his question. There was joy and there was pain in her hearing his words. But pain came uppermost. The joy had been put by so long! She thought that she had ceased to love him with that old utter love in those long hard years.

"Because,—now,—if you will,—I must have you for my wife, Say!"

It was real, urgent, pleading passion that sent forth

these words, but it sent them forth after the manner of the man.

It almost seemed as if he had come—at his own time—to claim her, who had been his, waiting his time.

“You are true and generous, be true and generous in this; forgive me, and let there be but one right between us.”

He wanted this, then! To give her back her money! This was why he said it “now!”

Her evil angel stood by and whispered it.

“I haven’t done it to buy your love, Gershom!” she cried, in a superb flash. Pride tingled all over her, from her head to her feet, and sparkled from her, like a thing overcharged with electricity. Whatever other force had been there, it was driven out.

“And my love is not a thing *to be* bought,” the man said as superbly. “I have told you honest truth.”

She repented of her bitterness; her pain smote back with double force upon herself alone.

He had called her true and generous, at last. Had she not lived and looked for this?

But, love? She would be true and generous, at least. She thought that hour of love gone by. It had been too long. Hearts miss each other, so, and lives run separate. The orbits intersect, but when the second sphere springs radiant to the point of meeting, the other has rolled on, alone, into a winter chill.

“I have told you that I love you. As a man should love the woman he asks to be his wife. I never said the word to a woman before. Have you no love to give me? I do not believe it!”

In strange, upright, downright fashion this wooer sued, making his virgin speech of love.

It helped her to be outright, too, as women seldom have the nerve-courage to be, answering such words of men.

"You shall have the truth of me, Gershom, as if we two stood in heaven. I cannot help what you are to me, what you have always been. God has put it into my life. Neither can you help it. It lies between us, and must be. But—I will not be your wife." She said it slow and low, the words came hard, but they came clearly. "My husband must not have even the memory of a contempt for me. He must not have been persuaded or convinced into loving me. Above all, he must never have distrusted me. Gershom, you *have* distrusted me—my very nature. You have despised and disbelieved me. If you had any love for me, you fought against it, and left me to fight against mine as I might. I have made something of it, so that I do not understand myself; a dull, half-murdered thing that will not die, but that cannot be, I think, ever again the old, bright, living love. What lies between us must be. We will be at peace, we will be friends with each other, but we will not marry."

"A blessed peace you give me! Say, you throw me back into my distrust of earth and heaven!"

"If that be possible, you can hardly ever have come out of it."

"You taunt me, Say!"

The pure, grieved spirit looked forth from her eyes.

"God knows I do no such thing. Did I ever taunt you? Should I be likely to do so now? O Gershom!

I said my husband must have faith in me, but more than all, in a higher faith he must be strong for me. He must stand nearer to God than I! It was this I meant; it was this I doubted. I *could* not taunt. I did not."

He felt that, and his look softened; his candour did her instant justice.

"You say true. You never did. It is I that have taunted. But you punish, Say! You show me what you are, and you tell me it is too late."

"I don't know what is too late. God will make whatever He means of it. It is between us, Gershom, as I said. We are not like other people to each other. But—I do not think—we can be, ever—husband and wife."

She said it slow and low, as before, as if thinking it out. It was worse than retaliation, it was worse than a meant punishment. It was the inevitable result of things; the attitude into which human relations—that will not stand still and wait, that can never twice in the same lifetimes be precisely the same—had come, by long bearing and pressure, and slow, imperceptible shiftings, to take between these two.

He saw, he acknowledged, but he chafed for the moment, as men will.

"It must be all, or nothing with us," he said, with an angry bitterness.

"I cannot make it all. It must be nothing, I suppose, if you will have it so, for a while. Afterwards it will be what God pleases."

It was not perversity; it was not wilful obduracy. It

was sad acquiescence ; it was a resigning herself to more long waiting ; it was what she could not help.

Gershom Vorse turned from her, and went and took his hat. Then he stood still a moment, and then came back and held his hand out.

" I won't pretend not to understand or believe you. I do both. I see you cannot help it. I am not ill-used. It has been my fault. Good-bye. I shan't see you again. I'm going away on business for the ship, and next week I sail for a two years' voyage."

The next moment the door closed on this rejected *man*, and his tardy, grand generosity.

Something,—courage, certainty, mistake, estrangement,—I know not what,—fell away suddenly out of Say's heart, and left a great asking, and emptiness, and misery there.

It is a story of threads and thrums ; I told you so before.

He had forgotten all about the money ; he remembered it afterward.

" I will never touch a cent of hers. She may put it where she likes. It may wait. Mother, we two must make our wills."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SUNNY CORNER.

THE business was done. Say had her way, apparently; but they had all thought afterward to have theirs, to prevent her ever feeling the difference. She was to go back to Hilbury; she was to live with Aunt Rebecca; she belonged there; it was her natural home.

But they found, when it came to this, that her way lay further—that it was still marked definitely out.

“I was not made to be an idle thing in the world. You have your work, Aunt Bessie, and uses for your money. Aunt Joanna has hers. I am going to have mine—my work and my money—nobody’s else earning or bequeathing. You might marry, or go away, or die, and then it would be neither your home nor mine. I am going to have a place of my own. I can’t be a nothing. When I die, I mean to leave some sort of a little hole in the world.”

Her playfulness was a cover for an evident determination. It overlaid a good deal else also—the aching, and the asking, and the misery that were in her at sharp times.

She had already acted, as well as determined. She had seen her old friend Mrs Gorham, and set her secretly at work. There was a post ready for her as teacher in a large young ladies’ school. By and by she should have a

Hopeley was a shrewd woman, and perhaps she meant it, in a secondary way. Say was "brightened up" a little, by a touch that never reached the real dull spot upon her heart at all. This is the way, and these are the tools, with which life handles us.

She went up to Grace's room with a feeling of a cheer—a pleasantness that were somewhere. The fine inner consciousness that, when we read it, becomes a second sight, was stirred, as sensitive nerves are stirred, when over the harsh breath of the east comes the first faint sweep of a wind from the south—from a summer somewhere—and coming.

A gift lay waiting for her,—the gift of a glad and beautiful instrumentality.

She was coming straight to where it lay, and she knew it not, but the presentiment of its delight was with her. She thought, if she thought at all, that it was all her bit of talk with Mistress Hopeley, and the atmosphere of her brightness and tidiness, and the daintier brightness she should find with Grace. The angels that led her, and knew what they had put for her to stumble on, knew better.

She had had a hard task laid on her, a thing to search for that was pain and shame to find; she had accepted it, and wrought it out of steadfast intent and purpose; as if in a precise amends for this, a thing she looked not for, which was a joy, and a clearing off of shame, was waiting to be given her to-day.

Up in Grace's chamber the afternoon sun, that had dropped below the fringe of summer rain-clouds, and bur-

nished for himself a golden gallery in the west, poured through aslant ; and the plants were green in the windows ; and the Sunday rest was upon all, sweeter even than in Mistress Hopeley's kitchen, that told of toil completed. There was no breath of toil left here. The light work of the week was laid away. On the little table in the dais window lay a book, with open leaves, as Grace had left it when the church-bells rang. Beside it a light basket held some golden bananas. There was a plate of Indian china also, and a fruit-knife.

It was plain Grace Lowder's opposite neighbour was at home. That she looked for Say, also, for whom the little refection had been set out.

Grace, herself, had not yet come. But her fan and her prayer-book lay upon her bed ; and a thin shawl, that she had changed for some other garment, was thrown there also.

Say walked to the dais-window and glanced out between the green. Nothing told her, even yet, but this creeping sense of joy and pleasantness, the thing she was to have to do to-night.

Over the way, a figure sat behind the out-swung blinds, —another friend, watching also, as she did, when Grace should come ; Gershom's friend, too, in Gershom's sometimes home. She looked furtively, and her heart warmed to the noble sailor, of denied, sad life, who was also Gershom's friend. And nothing whispered, even yet, of what was so near, waiting her chance turn and movement.

Is anything chance ? Is it not all preventing and providing—a gift and a showing direct ?

Edward Blackmere took his pipe from his lips, and turned full round; leaning his elbows square upon the sill, with his face forth upon the street. Say drew back. She turned toward the bed; she took up, mechanically the little, worn, old prayer-book, that, by some chance again, she had never handled before. Grace had another, she did not always carry this to church; she had never brought it to the Sunday school. It lay commonly with a Bible and a hymn-book, on a little bracket-shelf, of Grace's own contrivance, over her bed.

The book opened of itself in the middle, where the order of holy matrimony was set forth; where, also, at the beginning of the service, lay folded over, and fastened to the leaf, a small written paper.

Marriage lines. She saw the names that she had never seen before. "Hugh Lowder and Grace Blackmere." A date of more than thirty years ago, and the name of a little English seaport-town.

She turned the book to the flyleaf, with a strange thrill of expectation.

There was the name repeated,—“Grace Blackmere,” and a date still older.

But, up and down the cover, in a boy's stiff, learning hand, was another name, “Edward,” “Edward,” twice repeated. And then, in full, “Edward Blackmere.”

Again she had brought to light a secret, hidden thing. Faithful in that which was her own, this which was another's came committed to her; to her who held in her knowledge now the two ends of this broken thread.

It was clear and sure to her. She knew there had been

some strange sad story about this man's sister. That he had believed a sore ill thing of her; that he had lost her for long years. That Grace Lowder's mother had been an Englishwoman, as was also Widow Hopeley. And now—well it was God's time that had come; as had come also in that other finding; and this, too, was given her to do.

After that moment's thrill and wonder, she took the book in her hand, and went straight down-stairs—out at the door, where she saw Grace ten steps off, coming. She did not stop to speak or to explain. She let her act prepare her friend, and explain itself as it might. She went right over the street, and up at that opposite door, full under Blackmere's sight and Grace's.

Grace Lowder looked after her, amazed. Then a sudden forefeeling of something coming swept over her also, and took her whole heart in a vague storm. She went in, and up-stairs, trembling as she went, and stopped short when she reached the middle of her own room, and leaned there on her crutch, and waited.

Say rang old Crossman's bell. Blackmere was on the stairs already, and came and opened to her. She held her hand out to him,—the hand that had come "with a gift in it" to his own feeling, years ago,—and her look, lifted to his face, shone brighter, tenderer than she knew. His look upon her was what she had seen in that old first meeting,—gentle and kindly,—a rock warmed and lighted in the sunshine. She knew now what more she had seen in it then; what its blind reminder had been.

"I must come in. I have come to tell you something."

He was surprised, with such a surprise as the old patriarch felt when the angel came to his tent.

She could not say it here, in such a hurry. She let him lead her up into that room above. A strange place for her to be in,—a strange thing for her to do. But she never thought of the strangeness.

She stood there among Gershom's furnishings, in that chamber that was more like the cabin of a ship, with its lamp swinging from the ceiling, and its berth-like bed, set in against the wall. She stood beside the table where his maps and papers lay. Blackmere drew for her the arm-chair that she knew was his. But she did not seat herself, or pause.

"It is strange that it should have come to me. But I'm glad and thankful that it was given to me. I have found this."

She reached him out the little book.

How *things* outlast our lives !

That little, worn, old book ! His childhood came back with it. The smell of the old Devonshire woods ; the farmhouse home in the river valley ; the wild breath and voice of the sea, that came up and wooed him at last—when bitterness and anger drove him, also, away. The love of his dead mother, the "real mother," who had "gone to heaven, as the real ones do ;" the sister —— !

For a moment, the man's body was there, standing before Say ; his soul was away off, over the ocean, away back into long-gone years.

He knew it before he opened it. The thought and the breath of the old time came with it ; he laid back the

cover slowly, as one might fold back the door of a tomb.

His eye fell on the written names. He sat down on a chair that was beside him there, never thinking of Say standing looking on; he laid the book upon the table, and his head drooped over it; tears, wrung up through the strong life of the man, along this well-shaft that had sounded down suddenly to the sweet springs of his boyhood, ran from his eyes upon it.

Say turned away. A strong man's tears are sacred.

Then the memory of the shame, and the anger, and the bitterness, came back. *He* came back, through all the years again, to this present moment of his life.

"Where did you get it?—What good does it do me now?"

"I saw this, first," said Say, gently coming back, and laying her hand on the book beside his, and turning, as his hold yielded, to that folded paper in the middle, that opened as the leaves parted, and showed its old brown writing.

"I found it there—in Grace Lowder's room. She is my friend."

Then she moved away again a little, while he looked at it.

"Do you know what this means that you have brought me?" He spoke after a hushed pause.

"I think I do."

"I think you can't. It means the clearing up of a cloud, that came with a whirlwind in it, and drove me out upon the world, to be what I have been since. It

means that my sister Grace—whom I did love, though I cursed her—was at least an honest woman, as women's honesty is talked of in the world. It means that God has given me something of my own to care for at last. God! It means that He whom I said was nowhere in the earth, has been in all my life; and that I know it now."

No way of writing it can show with what a burst of untrained, urgent eloquence, that had in it a great astonishment of joy, a passion of regret, a rush of grateful tenderness, and a grand confession of heart-faith, Edward Blackmere spoke these words, or something like them, to Sarah Gair.

Then, suddenly, a fresh thought smote him. "I never told her my name, because there was a shame upon it. It is her shame now, and I must tell her! I believed the worst—God forgive me—of her mother. What if she should believe the worst of me?"

"You know she will not, Mr Blackmere. The worst is never true of anybody."

She spoke as one who knew. She, who came always with a gift in her hand for him, held it out,—this grand, beautiful human faith,—and he grasped it.

The human faith came too, the crowning of the heavenly. He was ready—the hard, doubting man—at last to believe, and to be believed in.

"Where is my little girl?"

Oh, how tenderly the rough man said it! how, with a voice of tears, he claimed and took this gift of God!

Say led him over, then, and sent him in.

There were three days before the new ship sailed. In those three days, what a carrying over of lovely things across the way into Grace Lowder's little room! Things that nobody, not even Gershom Vorse, had known of—things that for years had been gathering in that little back upper chamber, in locked sea-chests, in old Crossman's house, waiting for his little girl sometime, when he should dare to give them to her,—if ever he should,—all sorts of women's beautiful appointments, bought out of his hard earnings in all sorts of strange, far places where he had been since he had first found that there was this one little woman in the world that he would like to have a right to think of, and make glad. Now and then something had gone to her; but he had kept buying, and bringing home, and hiding away, with a strange instinct, things that he never really thought to put into her hands at all. A little delusion of what might be, had embodied itself so, and so had seemed half real. The little love that had crept into his hard life had been such an intensity!

On Thursday morning, the ship sailed away.

In two years he would come back again; then they would have their little home together. Meantime, white, folded messages would go out after him across the water, and find him in far ports; and letters, spicy from hot climes, ship-flavoured from long sailing, should come back to her. He had never had anybody to write to, or get letters from, before.

All had resolved itself in those three days. Mrs Hopeley—(I have not been able to pause to tell you of her ecstasy

at this solution of what "had been verily her main con-
underment" so long, at the opposite gentleman "coming
out, after all, as handsome as could anyways be expected,"
with a good plain English name of his own, whereby she
was to have henceforth "the good of him" as if he had
been a tin-dipper!)—Mrs Hopeley was to go, then, to one of
those likely sons of hers that had been long ago so "forard
in their means," and had gone "forard" ever since; and
Edward Blackmere was to hire her house, and come over
to the sunny corner—to the corner of his life, where the
tardy sun had at last crept round.

The Captain? There was always to be a place there for
the Captain when he chose to come.

It was Widow Hopeley's hour of triumph. Old Cross-
man's nose was decidedly out of joint.

Say caused it to be kept very quiet that, for these two
years, first, it was to be her home; they would end, as she
had all along said to herself, in the summer vacation.
There was Mrs Gorham, who had asked that she should
come to her whenever she could, and liked; there was
Hilbury, where she should always go for those joy-days
of the year. She should be in no one's way.

But her path tangled itself curiously with his. She
felt, somehow, that they could never part, and go quite
separate ways. This goes far to satisfy a woman; and
Say was not so sorely sorry as she had been.

She thought, even yet, that the old utter love was
changed—that she could not be his wife; yet she looked,
somehow, with a vague expectation for these two years to
end.

Whatever they were to be, each to the other, in their lives, they should be ; she believed in this, and waited.

Grace was content and happy ; she had two years to think it over in, to get used to it, and to be ready ; she could not bear it all at once, or all the time.

CHAPTER XXI

“ELECTED !”

Do the two years dishearten you? Are they wearisome beforehand? Have you made up your mind to skip them? I may have to skip them in great part too. Yet let me tell you, that it is the misfortune of readers, that they may skip—of books, that they must; that we will not accept an uneventful interval; that no life can be got wholly within two covers. Yet He who reads patiently the record that He lets us write, does not grow weary, nor skip—not even our times of sin; and ourselves, out of our books, we have to wait. We show plainly enough what we should do were the whole volume of life in our hands at once. But the dull places, and the long places, the places where things won't happen, ah, these are the very ones God means us most carefully to read!

There was much in these two years that might not be quite wearisome were we to settle down to it. Sarah Gair herself, having to settle down to it, found this. There were busy, happy days of contact with young, fresh life that she could help; there were trial days to be fought bravely through; the old word “elected” was in her heart when things were hardest; there were stanch

friends—friends of herself, not of her fortunes—who made bright hours for her of absolute rest; there were summer days at Hilbury that gave her the elixir of her youth, and made her strong.

Aunt Prue was kind; there was no place for mean, unreasonable resentment in her honest soul; that recognised truth always; that would have nothing else in itself, or in another. She had come to respect Say, and she showed it. There was more in her simple "I'm glad to see you, child," than in other people's most voluble welcomes; and, more than all, which proved how wholly she took her into her heart at last, she read to her bits of Gershom's letters, and told her all the news of him and of his ship. Not a hint of her knowledge of what had been, and been done with, between the two. Her native greatness turned itself, wide armed, toward this nature that she had found to be also great.

Say grew quietly, trustfully, hopefully content. Her love for Gershom had been so much a thing born with and grown up with her, that it could not partake of the fear and the uneasiness that attach themselves to love grown out of chance meetings; where to part once, is to be parted from utterly. She had "grown up with him in her heart;" Cousin Wealthy had truly said, their lives centred themselves alike; she never dreamed of his finding for himself a new centre; she knew, too profoundly, that they not only could never "be quite like other people to each other," but that none other could fill the place of either.

I said she was hopeful—hopeful of all good to come,

at last, to Gershom ; of a clear day that should burn away every old mist out of his soul. She was content, prevaillingly content ; yet there were hours of self-doubt and questioning pain, when she misgave whether or not she had done all that lay for her to do in righting the old wrong ; the words of Gershom, so dear to her recollection in their vindication of her truth,—“there is more than money-justice to be done,”—her heart took up in his behalf also. The shadow of distrust and unbelief upon him, which had come so largely from that wrong which lay at her dead mother’s door, might it not, of right, have been her work to win away ? Had she looked, with a strong enough faith, on her own part, through that which overlay his real nature, holding fast to that image of him which she knew to be the true apprehension of his inward self ; the self that should triumph—the glory in him that should come to be revealed ?

He was very generous ; he made kindly mention of her in the words that he sent home ; his calm thoughts were just thoughts ; she held him daily in honour more and more.

She clung more and more in her heart, and in little delicate ways of showing, to his mother,—the stern-judging woman that she had been so afraid of as a child.

When Gershom came he would find her grown very close there in his mother’s love.

Grace Lowder’s days dropped by like the sweet, quick notes of a song. It would not be long ; not anything was long between two hearts that felt each other and were sure ; a matter of leagues and degrees is nothing to the

electric wire. There was a great, strong love for her in the world; the world was one full joy; though it all lay between them, it was one great throbbing presence; there was no such thing as separation in it.

And by and by the two years were done, and came to their end. Two years and five weeks over; they had sailed in early August, and now the September days were come. But at the last news, all was well, and they were not yet overdue.

The time had not quite come for Say's school duties; but she had returned from Hilbury, and was getting settled in her new room. The sunny corner house was ready for its coming tenant; Mrs Hopeley's boxes were packed; her furniture sent away; Say's little nest was broken up, built over; nevertheless, she had had her share of pleasure in the building. Grace was like a bird, hopping from perch to perch of her pretty cage. She had spent the money Blackmere left her to make this home with; spent it, turning it into wonders of pleasantness and fitness, as only a woman of delicate thought and heart can do; and from bright kitchen to bit attic, the whole place smiled.

And then there came a week of rain.

Dreary, cloudy days at first, misting and glooming; then two days of real tempest.

And they knew that the ship was coming homeward—coastward. Grace read the prayer at night for persons at sea; it came to be in her heart all day.

Say came round in the twilight every day, and picked up the little evening paper on the doorstep, that they

left there for her to bring in ; and they looked to find ships telegraphed.

How shall I tell you what they did find, one night, at last ?

The weather was clear again ; people said the line storm was over early this year, and vessels had come in. For forty eight hours the bay had been white with them.

There was a long list of shipping intelligence.

There was a long column under the head " Disasters."

How shall I tell you what they found there ? How five little lines of type quivered at them, like dusky lightning, from the page, and blinded their eyes, and smote them to the life ?

How, that night, Say staid on with Grace, and their storm came down upon them, and grasped them, and hurled them upon the rocks of pain, while the air was full of drowning men's voices, and too late prayers to heaven ?

There was news of a large vessel driven ashore upon a ledge, down, off the eastern coast, and gone to pieces.

Dead bodies drifted ashore ten miles away ; and fragments of wreck found, with a portion of a name.

" —ajestic. Selpo—."

" No doubt the ship Majestic, Vorse, master, of Selport ; from Valparaiso, June 24th. All on board must have perished."

Say stayed with Grace that night.

And Grace, out of her little prayer-book,—that had brought her, in strange, long-awaited answer to all her faith and rest in it, this one, short joy of her life, that

was wrenched away from her again,—read the petition for persons at sea, because she could not leave it off as helpless words, even yet, though she knew her friend might be already where there was no more sea.

And then the two lay, sleepless, by each other's side, through the long, terrible hours; their hands clasped; sending up, heart by heart, little sobs, and speechless prayers to heaven.

Say thought back—how the thoughts will go back in moments like these!—and remembered the tame, habitual words that she had said for him when his ship was going down. She had not really been afraid of the storm for him, who had come through so many storms, who was in his own new, stout, noble ship. They had been quiet little heart-breaths rather, such as go up from all loving souls to Him who must care for all continually; else, though there be no cloud in the sky, we should all also perish.

"Why did she say such summer words, and so few of them? Why did she not feel the threat of every wave, and battle in spirit before God with each?"

Was it too late, even now?

"O Thou to whom the past is present, take the prayer of agony I would have prayed, if I had known, and somehow, in Thy mysterious power, send answer!"

He had gone without her love. Never knowing,—she did not know herself when she gave him that hard answer that she thought true,—what he was, what *he* had been, what he must for ever be to her. If she could but call that moment back!

The hours were not hours. They were the epitome of years. They were nameless periods of intensest life.

People expect to find friends, days after, in the first shock of sudden, terrible grief. They have gone by it ages' length.

At first, the time went by in tears and prayers ; then at the daybreak came a deep, strange joy.

" If it were so ! Even if it were ! "

The barrier was down between them, and for ever.

The something that would not let them fully understand.

That inner, real nature of his,—it had gone up. The hardness, and the mistake, and the doubting,—they were all beneath the sea.

Into that unseen world, where souls are,—in the body or out of the body,—she felt forth with hands of faith ; she felt him near. He understood her now. He had found the everlasting truth. In his purified, glorified manhood, he stood nearer to God now than she !

Life had held them sundered ; death had brought them soul to soul.

This was the rapture of the still sure dawn after the darkness ; the ecstasy to which grief climbed by those steps that were periods of pain.

But grief must fall back into itself, and climb again and again.

They rose up together, and shut out the daylight ; the bright riotous September sun, that came back as if his shrouding had cost them nothing.

The life of the great city woke ; wheels crashed by ; merchandise was carried up and down ; other ships were

at the wharves, unlading ; other sailors had come home ; it was as if there had been no storm, and no brave vessel and no loving hearts had been borne under, and gone down.

In the broadening, busy day, they could hardly feel it true.

Night came again, and night thoughts, and certainties of suffering. They cried, and prayed, and slept at length, from utter weariness.

In the second morning, Say gave her friend long kisses, and went home.

Aunt Prue came down from the country in the afternoon. Say knew that it would be so. She had the paper always, only twelve hours late, up there, in her hillside home ; and these tidings would bring her down, at least, nearer to this terrible sea, and the news of it.

The two women met there again in the crowded station. They grasped each other's hands, and never said a word.

Until Say led Aunt Prue into her own quiet room, and turned with arms held out.

"Aunt Prue, you do believe me now ! And I must comfort you !"

And Gershom's mother called her "child," and held her close.

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The last gasps of a south-easterly storm, down on the Atlantic. A great vessel out of her course, dismasted, leaking ; drifting, broadside on, to a lee shore.

Twelve men clinging to the wreck ; eight washed away

into the hungry sea, with sails, and ropes, and spars, and boats, that had gone, sweep after sweep, crash after crash.

In the deck-cabin lay the master, sorely hurt ; the bones of his foot and ankle broken by a falling timber, as he helped to cut away the mainmast with his own hands.

Beside him Blackmere, his first officer and friend ; nothing to do now but to stand by loyally to the last plank.

They heard the sound of the great seas as they shattered into breakers over the nearing rocks.

A heaving, as if the soul were going out of her,—which, indeed, it was,—a grinding, a shock that flung them helpless across her deck and floors, and the vessel, that had had such glorious life in her, lay a dead thing, cast up at half tide on a cruel outlying ledge.

Fast by her stern, between two gripping crags ; but she parted forward, and the cargo came out of her. Three more men upon the forecastle went down then.

Nine souls were left upon the fragment of her, and the tide was going out.

Night, and darkness, and shivering timbers, that might go with any shock. But the morning was coming ; and the storm, that had done its worst, was dying down, the wind was changing, and the tide was going out.

Broad day at last, and the tide upon the turn. Before them, the tumultuous ocean, seething after its long scourging, and turning its face this way, with death in it. Behind the ledge a calmer water, and more than half a mile away, showing between wave tops, as they lifted and lowered, a line of sandy island beach.

Men might live to get there. The ship could never last

that tide out. The sea would sweep clean over the whole reef.

Two men, strong, hardy swimmers, lashed themselves to planks, and flung themselves off; to be borne back by the fearful under-tow, and dashed, lifeless, among hidden crags.

High on the topmost point, the five men left got up a staff and a white signal. A boat might, by some wonderful chance, come out to them. All up and down, among those islands into whose broad fringe that eastern coast was torn, were homes of small sheep-farmers and hardy fishermen.

Long before noon, the golden sun shone clear in the blue heaven. And out there, over the dark points of rock, against the blue, two brave long-shore men saw the fluttering gleam of white. A vessel gone a-ground in the night, and souls waiting there, to perish; for the tide was three hours in.

Help coming. A boat, with men, and ropes, and poles, daring the waters, out of which the wrath had but half subsided. Climbing and pitching—toiling against the great incoming tide. But the wind had come out fair from off the shore, and they had set up a pole and spread a bit of sail.

Pollock's Ledge is a great sea-mountain, sloping up its gradual mass from the ocean front, and running abruptly down into the water on the shore side, at one point showing a bare perpendicular face at ebb. Near up, here, alongside the rock, buried two-thirds now under the rising tide, knowing their one safe approach, the fishermen came;

holding themselves off, at safe distance, against the strong force of recoiling waves, with their stout boat-poles planted against the ledge.

Three men stood by their frail signal-staff. Down from the wreck, along the broken slippery crest, dashed, even now, with the advance of the coming flood—where, through clefts, the water rolled already, clutching with its wavering deadly embrace the huge worn body of rock that twice, daily, it drew down into its sea grave—where the curling breakers, bursting nearer, every one, along the crags, might grasp and carry them away in the very face of hope—struggled two more, bringing a berth mattress with them, for the captain, insensible with the long pain of his broken bones, and the harder pain of his proud, brave, sailor heart. The boatmen flung their ropes, and the quick sailors caught them, and the bed was, so, swung over.

Blackmere, giant of love and muscle, came, toilsomely and perilously, last of all; stooping, clinging, hands and feet in the creeping water, salt spray in his face; bracing himself with every forward movement, against a possible threatening wave-shock, bearing his friend, unconscious, swathed in blankets, on his true chivalrous shoulders.

They fastened sling-ropes about the captain's body, they watched their time, when the boat, lifted on the surge, swayed nearest; they passed him safely. Blackmere's work was done—almost.

Then three seamen swung themselves after—only three.

"We can't take more. You'll swamp her. We'll come back!"

And the boatmen flung off the ropes, drew in their poles,

set their oars in the rowlocks, and turned their faces towards the shore.

But the sailors knew that there would be no time. The sea was upon them. The tide was more than four hours in.

They would have plunged down into the water, after the boat, those two left standing there with Blackmere.

"Hold back!" cried the mate, grasping them by each an arm. "Will you lose eight lives instead of two? God's here, as well as there!"

There was an angry, desperate blow; the brave man held on; another, and he fell back against the rock. There was a plunge into the sea; but the boat, lifted and swung upon the tide, had passed over in that moment from their reach; English Ned had saved his friend, the boy who had once saved him.

He was hurt by that ruffianly blow and fall. There was a shoulder crippled. He could not swim for it now, were it not even a hopeless thing to try.

If he must go, he would go with the ship, with what was left of her. He crept down, and up again, through the clefts of crag and the dashing water as he had come. He went back—the last man, alone—to face his death. He climbed upon the trembling timbers, lying even with the topmost rocks, over which the sea, returned to find its prey, began to break, with every burst that came more eager than the rest.

He held fast while he could hold.

He had one thought, with a long pang in it.

"My little girl!"

And then came Peace.

Till, in the seeming pitiless black wall of water that rose up at last, with gathered, towering bulk, above and toward him, he saw, as in the last extreme souls only see, a love and pity bending in the might that smote. A still, small voice, within the roar, spoke a triumphant word to him—"elected!"

And, on the seaward sweep of that backward thundering wave, a great, brave, *believing* soul went forth to God.

A strong thread, holding fast to many hearts, was—broken.

Loosed from earth, and drifted out to the Unseen.

Upon such lines hearts follow, and find heaven.

CHAPTER XXII.

LAST, BUT NOT FINAL.

AUNT PRUE had not come down to sit and grieve, and wait for certainty of ill to come to her.

"Pollock's Reef. And the news came by telegraph from Landhaven. I'm going to Landhaven to-morrow morning; and from there, as near to Pollock's Reef, wherever it is, as I can get."

A longing hesitancy came into Say's face.

"Of course," said Aunt Prue, reading it. "You, too, child;—your heart's there;—why should you act a lie?"

And Say was glad, and not ashamed to be read through, and to be made welcome so.

At Landhaven they got more news. The blessed news of life, at least. For a little only, perhaps. There was terrible injury and danger.

They thought that he would die. Say looked for nothing else. But if she could only take back that word of hers, so false as she felt it now! If she could only give him her love at last, to go from life with! If she could but cancel that sharpest agony before the tide of her grief surged back upon her!

If there were a chance given her! What had the two years done with that love of his, and his stern, strong nature.

Two days after their first meeting, Prudence Vorse and the "child" were together in the little fishing village of Wyacumsett, ten miles below the place of shipwreck ; where the bodies and the drifting timbers had come ashore, and where Gershom Vorse lay, with his shattered limb, and the sore anguish at his heart.

Back, out of strange confusion and wild dreams. Back, through a dreamless void and horrible pause. Groping back into the world of life again ; feeling, one by one, after the old fibres of mysterious association and relation, whereby, in delicate poise, identity swung,—somewhere ! Back, out of emptiness ; the atoms of consciousness regathered ; the soul, in short, come again into its body.

"Say !" It was his first word. How did he know that she was there ?

"I've been—a naked soul. I've been out—into nowhere. Thank God—for here again !"

He had been under the effect of ether. They had amputated his left foot.

"How did I know that you were here ?" He asked the question himself now.

"I felt you as I came back through the darkness. It was the first I knew that I was coming. It seemed to bring me back again—back to my place among created things."

He spoke dreamily ; words, perhaps, that would have waited, had the restrictions of a full consciousness been upon him. But it was the truth that came.

"Gershom!"

She could only speak his name after all. She could only put her hand in his, and hold fast by him, as if so she would hold him to the world, and to her love. The tone and the touch said all. A grasp, and a look lifted up at her, in which the soul flashed full to its presence-chamber, answered her. It was right between them, though it should be only at the end.

Clear recollection, as it came back, sent his thoughts, a moment after, to the live point of pain. A great groan surged up from the depth of his being.

"O mother! O Say!—Blackmere!—The noblest soul I ever knew has gone out of the world!"

And for days after he scarcely spoke again.

They kept him quiet. If they had known the sort of quiet that it was!

He lay there, doing double battle; his life fighting for itself against bodily outrage; his love against its loss.

Secretly waging a deeper, more interior strife than either, that none else knew; the truth that had come close to him in an awful new experience,—a something different from all experience of conscious, self-governed life,—measuring itself with old doubts; resolving, slowly, old problems of obscurity; working out a way for him—a strange and special way—toward the light.

He had trembled almost out of life—the strong man who had never felt physical helplessness, or any brain bewilderment before. In that mysterious anæsthesia, he had left sense and certainty behind him, and fluttered, a naked soul, into the void. He had barely, it seemed to

him, fluttered back. What was it? He lay there, and tried to sift, from among fearful impressions, what it had been.

Days after, at a moment when Say sat alone by his bedside, he spoke something of it out;—in words different from any she had heard from him before—words great and full, with a great pondering.

“Back again. Back to my place, Say! I know something about it now. I know what death may be. I know what madness may be. I’ve let go the little anchorage we call our life, and drifted out into the great emptiness that lies round it. Going out of one’s self is an awful thing! The danger and the pain,—everything else,—was nothing to that! I have laid here, and thought of it till it seems, sometimes, as if a very little would make me let go again, and drift away. What is it that we hold by? A few little outside appearances that hedge us in. Things round us that we see, and hear, and touch. When we lose these and go off, is there nothing, any more? Say! I seemed to leave all these; they jumbled up together, and fell away; and I went out—out—where there was nothing!

“There was nothing, and there was everything. It was not sea, nor wind, nor fire; but it was the possibility of them all. The world snapped like a bubble, and went out. There was an emptiness, a seething; as if awful forces might break loose, and take no law, perhaps! As if all things were resolved; and what had made life and safety, might make anything, and wild confusion, terror, pain. I cannot tell you, Say. My words seem wild; but

no words could be strong enough, or wild enough, to speak it. Does not the Bible say something about the 'secret chambers of the Most High?' I feel as if I had been taken in there, Say!

"I lie here, and think—of Blackmere, my friend—oh, my friend! The noble, noble fellow, who gave his life for me! And I wonder if souls go out into this, when they go wholly out of life!"

"Even in the valley and the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me! When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

Say could answer nothing but this.

"I cannot find it, Say! There was *nothing* there!" This was all, for long, that Gershom answered back.

And other days again went by.

And they had other talk—Gershom, and his mother, and Say—of the storm, and the wreck, and the saving of those four men only, out of all the great ship's company; of what they could easily fill out, from the facts known, and their own larger knowledge of the man, of Blackmere's heroism and fate. Of his "little girl"—to whom Say wrote every day; from whom came such sweet, sad, submissive answers—who should be their care now. Gershom wanted his mother to take her home to Hilbury. There was money for her—all Blackmere's savings. Gershom almost wished there had been nothing, that he might provide for her; that he might have this at least to do for his friend. But they would never lose her out

from among themselves. They would give her love, and home, and cherishing, for his sake.

And through and under it all—all tender, almost remorseful sorrow and reverent memory—through all bodily pain, and slow convalescence, and thoughts of himself and his future—and even the love of his life, borne back upon him so, and whispering an unsyllabled promise in the midst of all—through everything wrought still, incessantly, the deep, spirit-lesson God in His own way was teaching Gershom Vorse.

He had to sound the very depths. He had to feel what death and the grave might be; what the viewless forces were that worked about his puny life. He was given an awful, wordless revelation of wreck and horror that were possible. For some mysterious instants, he had been taken from out the harmonious working and relation of life, and thrust—a faint, trembling point of consciousness—into the elemental waste. He had felt the pregnant void, from which life might, or might not, according to some Unknown Will, be born. He had touched unfirmamented space, where seethed the unshaped principles of things, that, leaping to an equilibrium, might coruscate in worlds; that worlds, with one electric flash, might crumble to again.

It lay in his memory; it came back to him in the nights. The physical loss—the mutilation—he had suffered, was forgotten in this experience of soul that had come with it. He thought of his old talk with Say—of the “strength of the hills;” of the still, solid earth, and the silent gripe that holds its atoms; of all that he had that day talked of; the fury and riot of elemental and brute force, and of

human passions ; of all the horrible clash of Life with unheeding Law ; and he knew that nothing less than GOD was in and over it all.

That he had never really doubted. But man ? And what this God would do with him ?

He came round so, at last, to the Light.

As if he had never seen it in all his life before ; it was given now, a new and special gift to him.

One still, flushing, creeping dawn, he lay, alone with his deep thoughts ; and it was given to him.

Christ !

It was what He came for, out of the bosom of the Almighty. It was what He laid His finger on the tempest for. What He touched disease and discord for, and set them right. What He went down into the grave for, where men must go ; and, out of its blank and nothingness, came back, in His own glorious, unharmed individuality.

It was so He saved the world !

It was that His words meant that came thronging so.

" I am the resurrection and the life. Whoso believeth in me shall never die."

" In my Father's house are many mansions."

" I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, ye may be also."

" Of all that my Father hath given me, I have lost none ; and I will raise them up at the last day."

" Say, tell me the words of the Creed that you used to say on Sundays when you were a little girl."

And Say repeated to him the grand apostolic Confession of Faith.

"I believe," he said, solemnly repeating, when she had ended, in that full, manly tone that had never been afraid to utter a belief—"I *believe* in God the Father Almighty, and in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was crucified, dead, and buried, and who rose from the dead; I *believe* in the Holy Ghost, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead, and the life everlasting!"

There was a deep silence between the two.

"Thank God! Maimed, I have entered into life!"

It was only a whisper, with a hand over the face, and the face turned toward the pillow; but Say heard it.

Maimed, heart and body; yet, by divine paradox, a man made whole.

What more is there to tell?

He had come nearer at last to God, as she had said, through his fiercer pain, and loss, and wrestling; than even she.

They could not help what they were to each other; it came to be as it was meant.

"Will you take me after all, Say, as I am?"

And she took him as he was, not in his first young achievement, when she had craved to be nearest to him; when she had longed to say, "I had the dream of it with you, Gershie; I knew that you would do it; it is done;"—not in the full pride of his successful manhood, nor when

she had just proved herself to him, and he had owned her truth ;—not in any way according to any hope or longing that was past ;—in no moment of triumph, or of surprise, for him or her ;—in no climax of a common love-story :—but in quiet acknowledgment of the truth that lay between them after all, and as he was ; under misfortune, his life crippled in its activity, but his soul whole ;—years gone by that might have been years of a young joy, a fresh, unthinking love ;—years come, with grief that was dearer than delight, with memories as holy and as heart-grasping as their hopes.

There came to be a home again at the Old Farm ; and the wide house was full.

And Grace ? She was there with them ; Aunt Rebecca and she, with their sweet, denied lives, were the embodied peace and serenity of it.

“ The whole great earth was warm and close to me,” Grace Lowder said, “ because there was this love in it for me ; and now all heaven is warm and close, because the love is there.”

My story does not end as you would have it ? It does not end at all. We make an end of our tellings, but the stories of life go on. You may stop at a pain, or at a pleasure ; it is all the same ; the threads run on, and out of sight.

I know there has been more of waiting here than of fulfilment ; that not one life of all that are interwoven in these pages achieves a perfect earthly destiny ; that in all,

first or last, there is something missed or failed of; that each may seem, in part, defrauded; that the web is not woven without flaw or break, and finished with a hard, sharp selvage. Is any in this mortal weaving?

At the best, there is always more warp than woof. The tissue falls from out the loom at last, fringed with the thrums of unfulfilled, procrastinated hopes. The threads float forth into the infinite.

Not yet; but surely shall an hour come when the pattern shall be made complete; when every filament unweft shall be gathered from its aimlessness or its entanglement, joined to its own appointed fibre of immortal life, and woven into the one great golden web of joy!

THE END.

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